

Aspects of Authority
in the
Christian Religion

HENRY B. ROBINS



Division

BT

Section

88.5

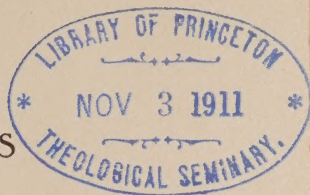
, R624

ASPECTS OF AUTHORITY
IN THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION

ASPECTS OF AUTHORITY IN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

BY
✓
HENRY B. ROBINS

Professor of Systematic Theology
Pacific Coast Baptist Theological Seminary



"He taught them as one that had authority"

PHILADELPHIA
THE GRIFFITH & ROWLAND PRESS
BOSTON CHICAGO ST. LOUIS
TORONTO, CAN.

Copyright 1911 by
A. J. ROWLAND, Secretary

Published June, 1911

Contents

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY	vi

PART I. HISTORICAL

I. THE STANDARD OF AUTHORITY IN JUDAISM	3
II. STANDARDS OF AUTHORITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH	12
III. THE AUTHORITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES	20
IV. THE AUTHORITY OF DOGMA.....	30
V. EARLY PROTESTANTISM AND THE AUTHOR- ITY OF THE BIBLE.....	41

PART II. CONSTRUCTIVE

I. THE BIBLE	55
II. REASON	68
III. CONSCIENCE	88
IV. CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS	105
V. JESUS	125
VI. THE RANK OF AUTHORITIES.....	145

Introductory

THIS essay is an attempt at such a study of the elements of authority in Christianity, both historical and vital, as will justify their synthesis into a consistent working unity. It is quite impossible, however, within the limits of this discussion, to deal with all phases of authority which have held sway, or continue to hold it, over the lives of Christians.

Only that can accredit itself as true authority which has the right to command. It is beyond peradventure that forms of authority utterly unjustifiable have actually enjoyed, for long periods of time, an almost unlimited sway over the lives of individual Christians. They have been able to perpetuate themselves for generations practically without protest from the rank and file within the church. Yet they are not thereby accredited. The power to command may be one of physical force or of adventitious circumstance. The right to command can alone accredit authority; and such right resides in no mysterious, transcendent sovereignty above the domain of reason, but grounds itself

[vi]

the rather in the fundamental relations which subsist between God and men. Such authority manifests itself as an immanent and structural principle of all life. In the more primitive and elementary stages of the spiritual life of the race, such authority may not be easily apprehended; but gradually and inevitably it must displace all merely external and fiat authority. It is the significance of maturity that it brings us from under the sway of authorities which are grounded in force or circumstance, and subjects us alone to that authority whose principle is immanent and eternal.

The present study is divided into two parts: Part I being a survey of the more prominent aspects of authority in Christian history up to and including the rise of Protestantism. The phases of authority thus dealt with are: The Standard of Authority in Judaism, Standards of Authority in the New Testament Church, The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures, The Authority of Dogma, Early Protestantism, and the Authority of the Bible. It will probably be noted that the most distinctive historic form of authority in the centuries preceding the Reformation—the authority of the “Church” (the term as thus used always indicates Catholicism)—has been omitted, except as it is

incidentally treated in the other sections. This is for the reason that it is not considered vital to the constructive purpose of this essay; it will always bulk large in any purely historical study of the subject, but less and less in all constructive attempts.

Part II necessarily deals with some general phases of the subject, the historical aspects of which have been dealt with in Part I; but, in general, it is a treatment of aspects of authority which claim supremacy in our own day. The topics are taken up as follows: The Bible, Reason, Conscience, Christian Consciousness, Jesus. The writer is aware of the decided limitations of his study of Jesus. Whole volumes have been written, and will be written upon this one summation of authority alone.

The final section is an attempt to relate the various aspects of authority so that they shall form a consistent whole, an actual working unity for the everyday Christian. It is here that any theory of authority finds itself long anticipated by the living reality of it. Yet the authority which discovers itself is not that to which, as external and fiat, the modern mind finds insuperable objection; it is truly personal and vital, the authority of life's processes and life's source.

Part II
Historical

I

THE STANDARD OF AUTHORITY IN JUDAISM

JUDAISM comes properly within the scope of this study, if for no other reason, because of its historical relation to Christianity. It is quite possible to imagine a Christianity unaffected by Judaism, but the Christianity known to the historian of the church and to the exegete is not in that category. Historical Christianity can scarcely be known apart from its background of Judaism, and more recent research but confirms the fact of which the New Testament had already assured us, that to a very great degree Christianity owes the garb it wears and the language it speaks to Judaism.

“Judaism” indicates, in its broader significance, the whole range of beliefs and institutions peculiar to the Hebrew people, but it has a narrower meaning as applied particularly to the type of Jewish belief and cultus which developed with the synagogue and culminated in rabbinism. It is, of course, with Judaism in this narrow meaning that we have to do. The earlier Judaism was characteristically religious cultus, the later Judaism was both religious cultus and the religion of a book. What “Jehovah said unto Moses” was supposed to be

supremely regulative of both doctrine and cultus, in this later Judaism. But in reality, when Jesus appeared, the subordinate, mediate authority of interpretation had all but shackled the alleged supreme authority of "What Jehovah said unto Moses." The Mishna, which embodies the findings of interpretative authority, itself declares that, "It is more culpable to teach anything against the regulations of the scribes than against the Scripture itself."¹ And it was a charge of Jesus that the scribes exalted the oral law above the commands of Moses: "Ye leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men."² We need to remember that there was a party of protest—the Sadducees—who rejected the authority of the oral law; but, as religious teachers, they were in dubious repute with the masses. They held fast the sole authority of the sacred books, as Josephus shows: "The Sadducees say that we ought to hold only that which is written to be the law, and give no heed to the new rules or traditions of the fathers."³ In this Jesus and the Sadducees agreed. But the people agreed with the Pharisees; and while the priestly aristocracy was Sadducean, it was in almost every instance, as Josephus further informs us, forced by public opinion to yield to pharisaic doctrine and demand.⁴ The opinions and

¹ Quoted by Seidel, "In the Time of Jesus," p. 134.

² Mark 7 : 8.

³ "Antiq.," xiii, 10, Sec. 6.

⁴ "Antiq.," xviii, 1, Sec. 4.

theories of the scribes swayed the masses to an almost incredible degree. As Seidel puts it: "The influence of the priesthood, and especially of the scribes, like that of the Pharisees, was exaggerated and excessive; their views, teachings, and requirements permeated every stratum of society."⁵ In the time of Jesus, then, the proximate and actual authority which swayed and ordered the existence of the masses was the tradition of the elders. Theoretically still the law was supreme, but its supremacy was more academic than actual.

Even as regards the Book, the masses were exceedingly dependent upon the priestly and learned class. That Book was written chiefly in Hebrew, while they now no longer used the Hebrew as vernacular; and thus, whenever the Book was read to the people, it must be translated too.⁶ It is a question whether there was ever a free reading of the sacred books upon the part of the masses of the people. They were dependent upon the institution and the interpreter, the synagogue and the scribe. The synagogue school, taking the law as its text, had already in the time of Jesus begun to give the child a verbal acquaintance with the sacred literature of his people. But this acquaintance was chiefly oral, and it is held that these schools did not exist in any large numbers until long after the time of Christ.⁷ The very expense

⁵ P. 129.

⁶ Schürer, "Jewish People," II, 2, p. 81.

⁷ Riggs, "History of the Jewish People," p. 217.

of biblical manuscripts put them well-nigh out of reach of the common people.⁸ It is important to remember that a large proportion of the Jews were now of the Dispersion, most of whom had come to use the Greek language; while even in Palestine many understood Greek and used it freely. And thus the much cheaper Greek manuscripts of the Scriptures were in the possession of many; indeed, the Septuagint was "the people's Bible."⁹ Even in Palestine it was allowed to be read as far back as the time of Christ.¹⁰ But by far the greater portion of the Syrian Jews of that day were wholly dependent upon synagogue and scribe for whatever knowledge of the Book they obtained.

The Hebrews of the Dispersion, and particularly those of Alexandria, were liberalized by their contact with Western civilization. Proximate authority, the authority of rabbinism, did not suffice for them. As Edersheim puts it: "Hellenic criticism could not be silenced, nor its searching light extinguished by the breath of a rabbi."¹¹ While the Palestinian rabbi might continue to deal only with the letter, the Hellenistic rabbi was compelled to find in the letter and in the Palestinian interpretation only the husk of truth. Thus, unconsciously in part, the Hebrews of the Dispersion were being emancipated from the slavery of the letter and

⁸ Edersheim, "Life and Times," I, p. 23.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Schürer, II, 2, p. 285.

¹¹ Edersheim, *ut supra*, I, p. 20.

from the authority of the rabbinic interpreter. The reflex of this Hellenistic influence was strongly felt in Palestine, as is evidenced by the fact that before the end of the first century A. D. Hellenism was a subject of inquiry among prominent Palestinian rabbis, and by the further fact that during the second century A. D. the study of Hellenistic literature, particularly Hellenistic religious literature, including the Septuagint, was put under the ban.¹²

It was, however, the Jews of Palestine who chiefly influenced Christianity at its inception. It thus becomes necessary to direct our inquiry concerning the influence of traditionalism more particularly to them. The return from Babylon marks a period of the rapid expansion and development of Jewish tradition. The Pentateuch was acknowledged in practically its present form from the time of Ezra.¹³ The Prophets and the Writings were never placed quite on a level with the Law. Traditionalism developed contemporaneously with the later portions of this sacred literature, and in time supplied an account of its origin as follows: Moses handed down the oral law from Sinai in such wise "that Aaron heard the Mishna four times, his sons three times, the elders twice, and the people once." These *Halakoth* of Moses from Sinai were not open to discussion, nor were they necessarily to be supported by proof from the Scriptures. But there

¹² Robertson Smith, "Old Testament in the Jewish Church," p. 87.

¹³ Schürer, II, 1, p. 310.

was a second class of tradition which consisted of implications of and deductions from the law of Moses—the germ of all teaching. This class of traditions must be supported by Scripture authority. A third class included “the sayings of the scribes,” confessedly unsupported by the Scriptures, and open to discussion by the learned.¹⁴ This third class possessed the same authority, practically, as the other two; though the scribes were wont to say that the written Law was supreme.¹⁵ Even these three classes do not comprise all, or even the greater part, of traditionalism in its later development; but they do comprise the bulk of it during the period under consideration. The Mishna, or Oral Law, was collected and fixed in its present form about the second century A. D.¹⁶

The mass of tradition was so great as to be almost hopeless, even for the scribe; and the multitude which knew not the Law were accursed.¹⁷ The effort of the rabbis was to show how “the simple Law could be made applicable to all imaginable circumstances of the manifold life of man; and the result was a subtilty, a slavery to the letter, and a casuistry, which often verges on absurdity and imbecility.”¹⁸ How hopeless was the problem of a devoted life! We can scarcely realize how intolerable this burden of tradition had become to the

¹⁴ Edersheim, “Life and Times,” I, p. 100f.

¹⁵ Edersheim, *ut supra*, II, p. 684.

¹⁶ Seidel, “In the Time of Jesus,” p. 104.

¹⁷ John 7 : 49.

¹⁸ Seidel, *ut supra*, p. 108.

masses, or how they must have welcomed the freedom which Jesus brought them. It was the common people who heard him gladly.¹⁹ Though they were in great measure ignorant of the letter of the Law, they were bound hand and foot by the doctrine of the authority of tradition. This path of progress might be impassable, but there was no other! And the grievous burdens which legalism bound upon the shoulders of the laity, the rabbins did not help to bear.²⁰ From being a spiritual and vital factor in the life of Israel, Law had become ceremonial literalism. The way to God lay by the road of the rabbin, so the rabbin declared, and the common man believed, until with unutterable relief he heard Jesus say, "I am the way."²¹

As has been already indicated, the sacred writings of the Hebrews never attained a dead level of equality. The "Canon" was never, in Old Testament times, a fixed quantity. The three main groups—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings—occur in this order in every Hebrew manuscript known—an indication of the order of their actual development. No ecclesiastical body of universal authority in Judaism ever passed upon the question of canonicity with the notion of a closed canon in mind. It is true that "about the end of the first century after Christ a sort of formal decision seems to have been given by the Jewish doctors assembled

¹⁹ Mark 12 : 37.

²⁰ Matt. 23 : 4.

²¹ John 14 : 6.

at Jamnia on the canonicity of certain books; and the same century saw three important groups of writings in all of which this idea is to a greater or less extent presupposed—the works of Philo, the New Testament, and the works of Josephus.”²² But the great determinant of canonicity was edifying use. Agreement as to the first two groups had been quite generally reached some time before the beginning of the Christian era, but the limits of the third group had not been definitely agreed upon. The canonicity of the books of Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Esther, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon was debated, even by Palestinian Jews, as late as the first century A. D. Jesus reflects this unsettled state of opinion in the terms with which he makes reference to the Old Testament—“The law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms.”²³ The Septuagint, in its inclusion of the Apocrypha, reflects a period when the limits of canonicity had not been finally established,²⁴ and gives point to that breadth of practical view which was more characteristic of the Alexandrian doctors of the law than of the Palestinian. The notion of indisputable authority was by all parties associated preeminently with the Law. Nothing could ever take its place; nothing could compare with it in sanctity.²⁵

²² Sanday, “Inspiration,” p. 71.

²³ Luke 24 : 44.

²⁴ Sanday, *ut supra*, p. 262.

²⁵ Robertson Smith, “Old Testament in the Jewish Church,” p. 161.

But of what practical service to the common man was such an estimate of the Law, when he was practically compelled to follow the scribes and Pharisees in leaving the commandment of God to hold fast the tradition of men?²⁶ It was they who made the commandment of none effect by their tradition,²⁷ and became blind leaders of the blind.

²⁶ Mark 7 : 9.

²⁷ Matt. 15 : 6.

II

STANDARDS OF AUTHORITY IN THE NEW
TESTAMENT CHURCH

WE have passed without doubt into a new era; we breathe a new atmosphere; we feel the pulsating energy of a new life. We feel instinctively that some great thing has happened, as shown by the spiritual emancipation so evident in the New Testament. What is it? So far as concerns our inquiry, it is the exchange of the authority of traditionalism for the authority of Jesus.

How did it come about? Very largely through the personal bearing and attitude of Jesus himself toward the authority of traditionalism, the authority of the scribes. The twenty-third chapter of Matthew may fairly be taken as depicting Jesus' attitude toward scribism. It is not alone that the scribes are hypocrites, binding heavy burdens upon others and not lifting them with so much as a finger;¹ it is rather that they have overlaid the law with useless subtleties² which confuse and distract.

¹ The term "Hypocrite" in ver. 13, 15, 23, etc.

² Matt. 15 : 1f.

They are blind leaders of the blind, of whom the people should beware.³

Though Jesus was often called "Rabbi," men must have seen, upon a little more intimate acquaintance, that he was not of the rabbinic type. "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes";⁴ he leaves his truth to its own inherent power of self-certification.

The emancipating influence of Jesus is nowhere more manifest than in that greatest of first-century converts to Christianity—Paul, the evangelist of the Gentiles. It makes no difference, for the purposes of our present inquiry, how that influence was mediated; for him to live was "Christ."⁵ In harmony with this dominant influence it is significant that, schooled though he was in rabbinic lore, Paul never made appeal to the oral law. It is true that we may discern, now and again, the dialectical methods of the rabbi in this great defender of the faith; but it is also true, as Farrar says, that "the ingenuity of the Jewish rabbi never for one moment overpowers the vigorous sense and illuminated intellect of the Christian teacher."⁶ This absence of direct appeal to tradition in one trained as was Paul is most remarkable evidence of the clear attitude of essential Christianity upon the sub-

³ Matt. 23 : 4 (contrast 11 : 28); Luke 11 : 46; especially Matt. 23 : 16f.

⁴ Mark 1 : 22.

⁵ Phil. 1 : 21.

⁶ See Farrar's "Life and Work of St. Paul," the very interesting chapter (III) on the "School of the Rabbi."

ject of rabbinism. This attitude is further defined by the criticism to which pharisaic legalism is subject in the teaching of both Jesus and Paul; Jesus speaking out of a clear perception of truth, Paul from a bitter experience of legalistic failure. The utter rejection of what Paul once considered authoritative is nowhere more clearly portrayed than in his Epistle to the Galatians, in which he addresses these words to his brethren who are about to be once again enslaved: "Now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again? Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain."⁷

We should remind ourselves that it was hard for the first Christians, who had been reared Jews, to become wholly emancipated Christians. It was much easier to conform outwardly to Jewish customs and observances, and much more natural to do so.⁸ Especially for those who still entertained the current notions of Messianism, and who had accepted Jesus as the fulfilment of conventional Messianic hopes, was there no necessary break with Judaistic legalism. Many, no doubt, regarded the whole ceremonial system as being still as significant and as binding as before their Messiah came. To

⁷ Gal. 4 : 9, 10.

⁸ Farrar, "Life and Work of St. Paul," p. 430.

them there was no apparent departure from the traditions of the elders; the whole Christian movement they regarded as essentially a Jewish affair. If other nations were to have part in its benefits, it could be only upon condition of their becoming Jews, proselytes of righteousness.⁹ The experience of Peter with the household of Cornelius, and the strange doings at Antioch, could but come to them as a rude shock. And when reports of the deeds of Paul in Asia Minor were received, they occasioned grave alarm, and were at once set down as irregular, nay, unlawful. When the overwhelmingly providential character of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles became indubitably manifest, the more candid, the real Christians, readjusted their notions of the place and function of the Law, at least as related to Gentiles. But the more radical, the actual Judaizers, went to their own place, became "merely a Jewish sect under the bondage of a ceremonial law, and only distinguished from other Jews by believing that Jesus was the Messiah."¹⁰ For years they maintained a desperate struggle to establish the supremacy of Judaism in Christianity, and dogged the steps of the emancipator of Christianity—Paul.

When the New Testament church, following the teaching of Jesus, rejected scribism, it carried over from its former estate, essentially unchanged, ex-

⁹ Conybeare and Howson, "Life and Epistles of Paul," p. 364.

¹⁰ Conybeare and Howson, *ut supra*, p. 465.

cept as to fulfilment, the teaching of Judaism concerning the holy Scriptures. As we have seen, in the time of Jesus the canon of the Old Testament was practically fixed among Palestinian Jews, although there was debate as to certain of the later books. The New Testament is naturally the chief source of our information as to the attitude of the Christian community toward the Hebrew Scriptures. It is quite evident that the Old Testament Scriptures, which Judaism everywhere received as authoritative, would be of peculiar service to a community which believed that it possessed the key to and fulfilment of these Scriptures. Especially is this true in view of the missionary impulse which Christianity manifested from the first. It was just this apologetic use of these Scriptures which Christianity made in its contact with the Jews. Paul's method is shown, for example, in his procedure at Thessalonica, where he visited the synagogue of the Jews "and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures."¹¹ And this was simply to follow Jesus' own method with his disciples¹² and others.

There can be little doubt that the Christian worship, modeled as it was to greater or less extent upon the Jewish synagogue worship, regularly involved a reading of the Scriptures.¹³ In addition

¹¹ Acts 17 : 2 (cf. Acts 13 : 27).

¹² Luke 24 : 27 (cf. John 5 : 39f).

¹³ HaDB, W. F. Adeney, Art., "Worship in the New Testament."

to the apologetic use of the Old Testament Scriptures above noted, there was a devotional use, a use for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction . . . in righteousness.¹⁴ In the memoirs of both Jesus and Paul it is the apologetic use which is prominent; but there was also a personal, devotional use, occasionally explicit, but always strongly implied. Even with Paul and his Gentile converts the Old Testament Scriptures had a place of pre-eminent interest; the whole economy of grace was "according to the Scriptures."¹⁵ The new era of grace and truth was not looked upon as an age unheralded; it was an age which God had "promised afore through his prophets in the holy Scriptures."¹⁶ And thus the new was, in a very significant degree, the fulfilment of the old. The Pauline doctrine of holy Scripture is expressed in the words: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience, and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."¹⁷ It was Timothy whom he reminded that the sacred writings could make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.¹⁸ No doubt Peter reflects the mind of the Jewish Christian community toward the Old Testament when he says: "No prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation.

¹⁴ 2 Tim. 3 : 16.

¹⁵ See, *e. g.*, 1 Cor. 15 : 3, 4.

¹⁶ Rom. 1 : 2.

¹⁷ Rom. 15 : 4.

¹⁸ 2 Tim. 3 : 15, 16.

For no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." ¹⁹

Thus far in this section we have considered the attitude of Christianity toward those authorities which Judaism acknowledged, and we have seen that, as touching Jewish ceremonial and tradition, Christianity's final attitude was one of complete rejection; while, as touching the Old Testament, Christianity's attitude was a development of the traditional Jewish attitude.

But the Old Testament was not the paramount authority in the primitive Christian community. There were media of direct communication with God; such is the witness and conviction of the church of those days. Judaism had known no such communication for centuries prior to the time of Jesus. The rabbinic "thus saith Hillel," had supplanted the prophetic "thus saith Jehovah." But now ensued a new series of theophanies, most of all that supreme Theophany, Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity realized him, and in the accessories of the new life which came through him, a channel of communication with God so direct as measurably to take precedence of that ancient Law speaking across silent centuries. Even after the ascension, the Spirit of Jesus was still with his disciples, and in such sense that there was a direct leading into the path of duty, as shown, for example, in the cases of

¹⁹ 2 Peter 1 : 20, 21.

Philip, Peter, Paul.²⁰ Such being the case, the relative importance of the ancient Scriptures was less. And then, within the first generation after Christ's departure, one can almost unhesitatingly identify the norm of new Scriptures, Scriptures which were to wrest from the Old first place in the affections and use of the Christian community. There were the Logia²¹ or sayings of Jesus; there was the oral tradition concerning himself and his doings. How they must outweigh in practical import and influence all laws or histories or even prophecies of Israel, especially with the Gentile churches! All authority was summed up in Jesus, the unique presence of the Holy Spirit did but voice his will. As Professor Moore puts it, these Christians had "something of their own to which they attributed an authority equal to and even greater than the authority which they conceded to the Old Testament."²² In another place he says: "Gospels came to have their authority because they were the best that men could do to fill the place of Jesus. Books, dogmas, organizations, came to have authority only as they were substituted for the influence of persons, and especially as they were representative of the influence of the one, mighty, quickening personality."²³

²⁰ Acts 8 : 39; 10 : 9f; 16 : 7.

²¹ Sabatier, "Religions of Authority," p. 47.

²² Moore, "The New Testament in the Christian Church," p. 20.

²³ Moore, *ut supra*, p. 316.

III

THE AUTHORITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
SCRIPTURES

WE have seen that the Christian church took over the Jewish sacred canon without change, and we have noted the place, practical and polemical, which these Scriptures held in the life of the early church. We have seen too, that in the Logia and in the tradition concerning Christ there lay the germ of new Scriptures. It was inevitable that there should be such; how else could the sacred words be transmitted? How else could the sacred Person be made real to succeeding generations? "The gospel narrative during the early apostolic age was chiefly an oral narrative,"¹ as Prof. William Arnold Stevens puts it. And that is as far as the New Testament carries us, for we have no mention there of the written Gospels in the churches of the period.² It is not necessary in this connection to consider the synoptic problem; it is sufficient for us to note that the oral account of Jesus' words and deeds—the real *εὐαγγέλιον*—was

¹ "N. T. Int.," p. 23.

² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

by various individuals reduced to writing as early as A. D. 75.³ We should also bear in mind that many others besides the four canonical Gospels were written; some of them, no doubt, as early as the four which were embodied in our New Testament.⁴ Soon or late, a great many accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus were written. Harnack⁵ has a list of twenty about which some information has come down to us. It is stated that of these twenty the Gospel according to the Hebrews is the only one which was at all generally received by the main body of the church.⁶

With the passing of the eye-witnesses, the various Gospels, together with certain Pauline and other letters, apocalyptic writings, and historical narrative filled the gap between Jesus and the church. This change was well under way by the end of the first century. It was only when "apostolic testimony" ceased that the written record came to its own, and even then but gradually. It is quite probable that all of the churches had some form of the oral gospel; a few of them an epistle from Paul. Beyond this, until after the end of the first century, most of the churches had only the personal recollections of their members of the words of apostolic men.

We shall not at this point raise the question whether it was this inevitable use and the resulting

³ Adeney places all three Synoptics from A. D. 65-75.

⁴ Luke 1:1.

⁵ "Chronologie," pp. 589-651.

⁶ Bennett and Adeney, "Int.," p. 279.

sense of edification that brought about the acceptance of these writings as of superior authority. Unquestionably the fact of use figured largely in the matter, while at the same time it was not the only determinant, and not at all the occasion of a doctrine of inspiration involving the canonicity of some books and the rejection of others. This followed, in part at least, upon the realization of the need of homogeneity of doctrine if the church was to make progress against philosophy without and heresy within.⁷ However it may have been in later usage, in the first century and a half no hard and fast lines were drawn between canonical and uncanonical. There were in common use, in whole sections of the church, and even in some cases much later than the middle of the second century, books which for one reason or another failed of canonical standing. Their use was, as a rule, not general, though it might be dominant in certain regions. To describe these works as "extra-canonical" is perhaps to mislead, for the reason that such terms did not come into use until the last quarter of the second century, and even then gained but slow recognition in some quarters. For example the Diatessaron of Tatian displaced the four Gospels with the churches of Syria until the fifth century."⁸ The momentum of use carried many a proscribed treatise beyond the period of the first

⁷ Ferris, "The Formation of the New Testament," p. 21f.

⁸ Moore, "The New Testament in the Christian Church," p. 71.

cataloguing of "canonical" books, and even beyond the period of the first ecclesiastical decrees upon the question.

It would be exceedingly interesting to know just how these separate books got together. It is conceded that the Logia were pretty generally collected before the year A. D. 65, but whether they ever existed as a separate document without historic framework or setting can hardly be determined beyond controversy.⁹ The sayings of Jesus have come to us embedded in the Gospels, and it requires some effort to think of them as having been once in circulation apart from the framework in which they now appear. Similarly we are in the habit of thinking of the Gospels and Epistles of Paul in their group-setting. That they were once adrift without relation to any organized collection, segregated, and—so to speak—complete in themselves, we do not often recall. The letters of Paul, for example, traveled thus alone for forty or fifty years before they were embodied in any comprehensive collection.¹⁰ It can easily be seen how such collections would tend to enlarge or to displace the collections of particular churches. The circulation of these collections must have been at first limited only by natural human conservatism and the peculiarities of taste, being otherwise free and natural. But such a condition was evanescent. It soon came about that

⁹ Bennett and Adeney, pp. 317, 325.

¹⁰ Sanday, "Inspiration," Appendix, says that they were thus collected by A. D. 117.

writings for the first time seeking general acceptance by the churches must pass muster with the more eminent church leaders. A word from these champions of orthodoxy carried great weight.¹¹ It has been charged that this influence was the mere utterance of a dictatorial "I"; that "it was a fiat and not an investigation which gave to the world the final decision."¹² It may be questioned, however, whether so sweeping a statement is justified. While there was not the orderly course which modern habits of thought and modes of action would suggest, large deference was paid to actual edifying use, and wherever this occurred Christian consciousness was the real determinant. It remains for the pleader to show by comparison of values that the church has lost any great truth or body of literature through the overzealous censorship of church dignitaries. Judging from what remains to us of the extra-canonical, the thesis would be hard to maintain. Professor Moore says that the attempt of scholars to gather together all the sayings of Jesus reported from extra-canonical sources "enhances our confidence in our Gospels to a high degree." Of one hundred and sixty-five citations, one hundred and three may be dismissed as undoubtedly apocryphal. Of the remaining sixty-two debatable examples, hardly ten are above the level of being considered inaccurate quotations.¹³

¹¹ Moore, "The New Testament in the Christian Church," p. 27.

¹² Ferris, "Formation of the New Testament," p. 189.

¹³ Moore, *ut supra*, p. 66.

If personal influence and relatively accidental circumstance largely determined use before the particular books had been collected and stamped with canonicity, what was it, when the final test came, that determined whether or not a book was canonical? Sanday gives these tests as: (1) Apostolicity—not merely that a book should be authenticated by apostolic authority, but that being so, it was the work of an eye-witness or of a careful historian; (2) reception by the churches; (3) conformity to established doctrine; there being enough well-authenticated writings to serve as standard by which to judge the rest; (4) conformity to recognized history; (5) the mystical significance of numbers—the application to the Christian subjects of intellectual methods current at the time.¹⁴

The actual sifting was almost at an end ere there was an ecumenical decree upon the subject. The Trullan or Quinisextine Council of A. D. 692 indorsed the lists of two earlier synods, one held at Carthage in 419, the other at Laodicea in 363, together with the lists of the so-called Apostolic Canons, and three other lists by leading Fathers. It is interesting to note that the bishops and Fathers had so largely completed the work that only indorsement was required. It is true, however, that the lists thus indorsed were not absolutely identical, though there was general agreement.¹⁵ This fact

¹⁴ Sanday, "Inspiration," p. 47f.

¹⁵ Sanday, *ut supra*, p. 6.

suggests that the lists were more or less authoritative, as the Fathers who formulated them were more or less influential. This Trullan decree with its quotations was not the beginning, but rather the end of such lists, for they run clear back to the time of Marcion, whose list—clearly prejudiced in its formation—is the earliest extant (cir. A. D. 140). Though there was a virtual canon by A. D. 200, there is considerable variation in the different lists. Tertullian (A. D. 194-221) accepts as canonical twenty-three of our twenty-seven books, omitting James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John; Hyppolitus (A. D. 200-235) accepts twenty-one, adding Hebrews and Jude to those omitted by Tertullian; Origen (A. D. 185-253) has the complete New Testament canon, but expresses doubts about 2 Peter and 2 and 3 John; Eusebius notes that a minority disputes 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James, and Jude, while the Apocalypse is in the balances, Cyril of Jerusalem (A. D. 348) omitting it. Even the Council of Laodicea (itself but a synodical council) omits the Apocalypse.¹⁶ The Syrian church as late as A. D. 419 recognized only three of the five catholic epistles as canonical. Moore is of the opinion that the Apocalypse finally got into the canon by virtue of the impression that it was the work of an apostle.¹⁷

If Sanday's analysis of the notion of canonicity is correct, it becomes apparent that the process of

¹⁶ Sanday, "Inspiration," p. 463f.

¹⁷ Moore, "The New Testament in the Christian Church," p. 59.

canonization was not governed by any fixed theory of inspiration. That there was a definite concept of inspiration in connection with the Old Testament books is quite probable; but that any one thought of putting these memorials of the New Covenant on a par with the Law and the Prophets does not appear. The books did not form a single collection until about the year A. D. 165, and even then they were not conceived of as Scripture.¹⁸ It is true that there was a doctrine of inspiration relating to the prophets and apostles of the New Testament churches; but that doctrine was extended to the writings of apostolic men and their associates only gradually. We discover such an extension in Irenæus (A. D. 125-202), in Clement of Alexandria (taught in Alexandria, 191-202), and Origen (185-253). Origen, however, held that the inspiration of apostles was inferior to that of the prophets of the Old Testament, and that among the writings of the apostles were many passages which sprang from no immediate divine influence.¹⁹ It was in Irenæus first that the word "Scripture" came into use for the books of the New Covenant.²⁰ Tertullian made a claim of special authority for the writing of the apostolic New Testament: "We lay it down as our first position that the Evangelical Testament has apostles for its authors, to whom was assigned by the Lord himself this office of publishing the gos-

¹⁸ Moore, "The New Testament in the Christian Church," p. 88.

¹⁹ Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," pp. 75, 76.

²⁰ Moore, *ut supra*, p. 109.

pel.”²¹ He placed their writings upon the same level as those of the Old Testament, as the following utterance shows: “. . . the law and the prophets she unites in one volume, with the writings of evangelists and apostles, from which she drinks her faith.”²²

That there was no universally received theory of inspiration is evidenced by the great variety of opinions concerning it to which the early Fathers gave utterance. As Sanday puts it: “There was not indeed any hard and fast dogma of inspiration imposed upon the whole church. Men formed an idea of it, and they clung to that idea, largely, we cannot doubt, from a sense of the preciousness of the Scriptures to themselves. But this did not prevent them at other times and in presence of other trains of thought from giving rein to a free and more candid observation, and allowing the facts to tell their own story in a simpler and more natural theory.”²³ Nor was there an elaborated and universal theory of inspiration—though the fact was held with some insistence—until the rise of Protestant orthodoxy.²⁴

In the last quarter of the second century, “against the growing danger threatened by the Gnostic movement, the church preserved her uniform existence and historical continuity by the establishment of a threefold authority—the bishop’s office, the articles

²¹ “Adv. Marc.,” IV, 2.

²² “De Praescr.,” 36.

²³ Sanday, “Inspiration,” p. 45.

²⁴ Foster, “Finality of the Christian Religion,” p. 65.

of faith, and the New Testament canon. Toward the close of the second century this threefold authority was settled in essentials, and thereby the existence of the Christian church made certain."²⁵ From this time forward it was increasingly difficult for non-canonical writings to exercise the influence they once had. It was not alone their alleged inferiority, but also the hostility of the "canonical" which led at length to their disuse. The fires of controversy were reduced to a few glowing embers by the end of the fourth century, and the task which remained to succeeding generations was simply that of recording results.²⁶

²⁵ Pfeiderer, "Christian Origins," p. 281.

²⁶ Sanday, "Inspiration," p. 11.

IV

THE AUTHORITY OF DOGMA

ALL religion has doctrinal implications, and every religion has its doctrines. Israel had certain cardinal points of faith from the dawn of her religious history, though these doctrines were largely implicit or inchoate during the earlier stages of that history. Gradually, as the fruitage of prophetic genius or as the expression of the working conviction of the people, these implicates of her faith became explicit. The peculiar tenets, whose embodiment in Israel's religious economy would have made her glorious, had, ere Jesus came, largely given way to a multitude of inferior counsels, whose sway could but end in the ignominy and moral blindness of Israel. But these inferior counsels had all the weight of dogma; and the revolution which the new doctrine called "the Way" effected was in reality a revolution in beliefs. It rested distinctly upon teaching, upon clearly defined doctrine. * It is not too much to say that wherever there is religious cultus there is also doctrine, for cultus rests upon conviction—the conviction of some, at least.

But dogma there was not, one might say could not be, until such a level of intellectual life had been reached as demanded the philosophical expression of faith. While philosophy did not, as a rule, consciously figure in the formulation of dogma, such formulation at least was conditioned by it. Judaism could scarcely be said to have had a philosophy in the proper sense of the term; as Davison puts it: "In the narrow sense of the word which confines it to human speculations in pursuit of abstract truth, to systematized thoughts constructed on a basis of metaphysics and ruled by the strict rules of reasoning, philosophy is foreign to the Jewish habit of mind, and finds no place in the sacred Scriptures."¹ It was not until Christianity had passed into the hands of the Gentiles and sufficient time had elapsed after the falling of the curtain upon the last act of the New Testament drama to admit of retrospection, that dogma began to be formulated. Reflection upon the great facts of Christian experience and tradition, and more especially the necessity of having an apologetic which would weigh with the thinkers of the time outside the church and in²—these were influences which led to the formulation of dogma.³ They were not the only influences, to

¹ Davison, "Wisdom Literature," p. 1.

² Pfeiderer, "Christian Origins," p. 281, notes that when threatened by the Gnostic movement, Christianity preserved her uniform existence by the establishment of a threefold authority—the bishop's office, the articles of faith, and the New Testament Canon.

³ Sabatier, "Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion," Bk. 3, Chap. 1.

be sure; but they were sufficient of themselves to have produced it.

The dialectic at hand for such an apologetic as the church needed was that of the current metaphysics. Reflection meant generalization; generalization demanded for the expression of the relations which its synthesis of the Christian facts discovered a whole technical vocabulary. Such a vocabulary was discovered in the current Greek philosophies. There is no need at this point to raise the question of the undoubted distinction between this metaphysical Christianity and the ancient philosophies themselves. Nor do we need as yet to ask whether the creeds of the church have not in some instances gone far beyond the sufficient warrant of the New Testament. It is very likely that their influence was not an unmixed good. But it is sufficient at this juncture to note that in the formulation of the ecumenical creeds the Greek philosophies exercised an undoubted influence; that they were, as Fisher puts it, "the 'psychological climate' in which theology took its form."⁴

Dogma has had an extension within the Christian church beyond the ecumenical creeds. Sectarian peculiarities have found their expression in the same fashion, and the claims made for the classic creeds have been reechoed by the sectarian Confessions. With greater or less unanimity, however, the historic ecumenical creeds have been admitted to pos-

⁴ "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 32.

sess a certain authority. The nature of that authority has not always been agreed upon. Both the historic creeds and the sectarian Confessions were the growth of many generations,—a fact wholly consistent with their human origin. Doctrine, as thus expressed, does not come from the clouds, the direct fruitage of supernatural intervention; it comes from the heart and brain of the church, or of some great section of it, and whatever legitimacy it may possess it derives from the normality and regularity of the processes which produced it.

Our first concern in this section is with the ecumenical creeds which form a bond of union between the Greek, Latin, and evangelical churches.⁵ The symbols thus designated are variously indicated as being three or four in number. The three which, without question, belong in this category are the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds. The Christological statement of the Council of Chalcedon is sometimes added, making the number four. One who makes a study of the origin and content of these creeds is immediately impressed with their occasional nature, with the possible exception of the Apostles' Creed. Like the New Testament books, they served an immediate and incidental purpose, and were framed for the needs of the times. That they have served the church of later generations is doubtless due to other causes than the conscious intent of their framers. The

⁵ Schaff, "Creeds of Christendom," Vol. I, p. 12.

fact remains that, with the exception of the Apostles' Creed, they were born in the heat of doctrinal controversy.

In the face of the Gnostic heresy the church felt itself helpless without a formal statement of doctrine. It could not use the Old Testament even, for the Gnostics repudiated that, and the general allegorical method of interpretation could wring any meaning from it. In this extremity the church made use of an old baptismal Confession which was at hand, and which had the prestige of long usage. It was averred by some to have been in use from the days of the apostles, in some germinal form at least. It had long been in use in the churches, especially of North Africa and Rome, and was now, by the year A. D. 200, for apologetic reasons, generally adopted by the churches of the West. Its earliest extant form is believed by Zahn to have been in use by the Ephesian Christians as early as A. D. 130.⁶ There were several variant forms of the Confession, and it was the form in use in southern Gaul which at length superseded the older forms in use among the churches in the West, though this did not take place until the fifth century,⁷ and variations in form occur as late as the eighth century. The general acceptance of this creed by the end of the second century supplied the churches of the West with a definite and au-

⁶ Fisher, "History of Doctrine," p. 71.

⁷ Fisher, *ut supra*, p. 71.

thoritative symbol, the basis of later elaborated dogma.

This symbol is very simple and unscholastic, and it is quite apparent that dogma is yet largely implicit. We have here only the most simple possible statement of beliefs, and in no wise an attempt at the philosophical statement of the Christian faith. If one compares it with the Nicene Creed, he marks in the latter a considerable advance toward the subtler form of statement; the creed is no longer quite so naïve and elemental. The symbol of Chalcedon is far more metaphysical, and the Athanasian Creed presents the process in its culmination.

The Apostles' Creed had its chief vogue in the West. In the East it was for a time somewhat used, but was never acknowledged as of apostolic authority. The Eastern form of the primitive creed,⁸ the outgrowth too, of earlier baptismal Confessions, became the basis of the Nicene Creed. The crux of this creed is the relation of the Father to the Son; it being here settled for orthodoxy that the Son is of the same essence as the Father, though standing in the relation to him in which that which is begotten stands to that which begets.⁹

In the West the adoption of the Apostles' Creed was the spontaneous act of the churches, unforced by the action of any synod, the churches being free

⁸ Schaff, "Creeds of Christendom," Vol. I, p. 24.

⁹ Hagenbach, "History of Doctrines," I, p. 248.

to phrase the Confession as they chose. The Nicene Creed (A. D. 325) was, on the contrary, enjoined by synodal authority, and this aspect of authority was further heightened by the anathema against the Arians which the creed bore from the beginning. It was under the pressure of heresy that this creed was at length adopted as final, the Council of Ephesus (A. D. 431) and the Council of Chalcedon (A. D. 451) solemnly and upon pain of excommunication forbidding the setting forth of any new creed.

The Council of Chalcedon, in addition to other proceedings, issued one of the most important of the ancient symbols of the church. The consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, as to his Godhead, and with us, as to his humanity, is unequivocally declared; also, that he is one person in two natures, united "inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably," the property of each nature being preserved in the union.¹⁰ It was understood that this symbol should bind both parties to the Monophysite controversy,¹¹ though that is just what no symbol ever quite succeeded in doing.

The so-called Athanasian Creed, which made its appearance in southern Gaul not earlier than the close of the fifth century,¹² and which did not arrive at its final form until the close of the eighth century, was based upon the Chalcedonian Christ-

¹⁰ Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 155.

¹¹ Hagenbach, I, p. 299.

¹² Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 51.

ology, and embodied in its first part the Augustinian doctrine of the Trinity. Here, says Fisher, "the process, if one may so say, of equalizing the persons (of the Trinity) is seen at the climax. The attributes of deity are one by one affirmed of the three persons severally. . ." This creed contains in both parts a damnatory clause. It is "not merely a solemn warning against the great danger of heresy, nor, on the other hand, does it demand, as a condition of salvation, a full knowledge of and assent to the logical statement of the doctrine set forth (for this would condemn the great mass even of Christian believers); but it does mean to exclude from heaven all who reject the divine truth taught therein."¹³ Every one who would be saved must believe in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one in essence, three in persons, and in Jesus Christ, very God and very man in one person. The text of the creed in these sections is illuminating as showing how much has now become explicit in orthodoxy: (1) Who-soever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith. (2) Which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. (3) And the Catholic faith is this: . . . He, therefore, that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity. (29) Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he also rightly believe the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. (30) For the right faith is

¹³ Schaff, "Creeds of Christendom," Vol. I, p. 39.

that we believe and confess that. . . (44) This then is the Catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved."

This is in brief the evolution of dogma as represented in the ecumenical creeds. It is with the form rather than the substance that we have to do in this study, with the fact that from a state in which dogmatic forms of statement were conspicuous by their absence, Christianity passed to a state in which dogmatic declarations of faith became characteristic. It is the transition from naïve and spontaneous expression of the religious life to definite and authorized declarations of orthodoxy. Protestantism did not culminate in a real "reformation" in this regard. The dogmas of the ecumenical creeds were not involved in the schism which the Reformation wrought. Both Catholic and Protestant ecclesiastical bodies affirmed their faith in these creeds, and in so far vindicated their orthodoxy. And what is more to the point here, the same general attitude concerning the finality of dogma was preserved, in differing measure, by both parties. The proceedings of the Council of Trent ended with an anathema upon all heretics. The Cardinal of Lorraine exclaimed, "*Anathema cunctis haereticis!*" and to this the Fathers responded, "*Anathema, anathema!*" The Tridentine profession of 1564 expresses the virtue of orthodoxy in these terms: "I do at this present freely profess and truly hold this true Catholic faith, without which

no one can be saved . . ." (Art. 12). Catholicism has preserved this attitude of anathematization of heretics. The Vatican Decrees embody eighteen canons anathematizing heretics, and end with an anathema upon him who denies the dogma of papal infallibility.

Protestant Confessions vary greatly in the terms used and the individuals or parties condemned. The Augsburg Confession does not go into the condemnation business wholesale, but deals out quite enough to the poor Anabaptists. Doubtless the apologetic character of the Confession determined its freedom from ultra-dogmatic expressions.¹⁴ The Second Helvetic Confession, which had its widest vogue among Reformed churches, in practically every article condemns those who hold a different belief. This Confession expressly makes it the duty of the magistrates to punish heretics who are incorrigible (*coerceat et haereticos—qui vere haeretici sunt—in-corrigibiles*). Schaff says that "the Reformers differed from the Roman Catholics not so much in the principle of persecution as in the definition of heresy and the degree of punishment."¹⁵ Calvin held to the legitimacy of punishing heretics, and thought that the fact that innocent people were sometimes burnt by the Romanists was no good reason why Protestants should spare the guilty. All the Reformers approved the burning of Servetus, which

¹⁴ In ten clauses various heretics are condemned (*damnare*).

¹⁵ "Creeds of Christendom," Vol. I, p. 420.

was simply the carrying out of Calvin's theory. The Westminster Assembly, by the adoption of the Solemn League and Covenant, was pledged to the extirpation of all heresy.¹⁶

It ought to be noted, however, that there was a very considerable recession from the rigid views of Calvin and his co-laborers, and that the general Protestant view of infallibility and authority became as time passed very widely differentiated from the Roman Catholic view. The Thirty-nine Articles (Art. 34) allow diversity of traditions and ceremonies; the Scotch Confession (1560) admits its possible imperfection, and is far from claiming infallibility. The First Confession of Basle (1534) makes a similar admission. Other instances within the period proper of the Protestant Reformation might be cited, while a most casual review of modern Confessions reveals the outworking of that principle of individual freedom in the religious life which really lay at the root of the movement.

¹⁶ The Second Scotch Confession (1580) is highly militant: "We abhorre and detest all contrarie Religion and Doctrine; but chiefly all kynd of Papistrie."

V

EARLY PROTESTANTISM AND THE AUTHORITY OF
THE BIBLE

HARNACK declares that the struggle with Gnosticism compelled the church to adopt fixed forms of teaching, discipline, and worship, and to exclude every one who would not conform.¹ Not only was the canon of Scripture fixed, but it came to be regarded as under the special guardianship of the line of bishops, this line of bishops being the ultimate guarantee of the unity of the church.² The traditions of the apostles preserved by the Roman Church were regarded as of a very high order, so much so, declared Irenæus that other traditions must conform thereto (*Adversus Haereses*, III, 3, 2). While it is true that general councils were for a long period believed to possess infallible authority, the influence of the Roman bishops in the decision of these councils is significant. It was Constantine who first formed the idea of a universal synod, and who declared that such a body was under the special guidance of the

¹ "What is Christianity?" p. 222.

² Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 76.

Holy Spirit, and therefore incapable of error. In the course of the fourth century the infallible authority of the Nicene synod became slowly established; and this idea was subsequently transferred to the ecumenical councils in general. By the end of the sixth century the final authority of the ecumenical councils had very general acceptance, though there was still some dispute as to whether certain synods had been regularly constituted. After the seventh century the Eastern Church accepted as a settled principle the final authority of the Scriptures and of the seven ecumenical councils.³ In the West, however, the movement did not end with a declaration of the authority of ecumenical councils. While the East regarded doctrine as crystallized and explicit for all time in the findings of the ecumenical councils, the West came at length to the idea of progress from a less to a more definite explication of doctrine. "The Church (so Vincent of Lerins taught) had received two graces to enable her to accomplish her mission as guardian and protector of truth—the grace of fidelity in conserving the primitive faith; the grace of inspiration and discernment to complete this faith, as time might demand, and make it always and everywhere victorious over error."⁴ This is the early form of that Catholic principle of development which found modern exponents in De Maistre,

³ Harnack, "Hist. Dog.," Vol. III, p. 215f.

⁴ Sabatier, "Religions of Authority," p. 65.

Mohler, Newman, and more recently in the Abbe Loisy. Loisy says: "The church became, at important moments, what it had to become in order not to decline and perish, dragging the gospel down with it. Nevertheless it created no essential part of its constitution. An organ which up to one moment seemed rudimentary . . . took on the proportions which an imminent necessity demanded."⁵

During the period of the ecumenical councils the Roman bishops gained ever-increasing influence as arbiters in doctrinal disputes, and at length Leo I (440-461) asserted their supreme judicial authority. In the earlier doctrinal controversies the Roman Church maintained an unflinching orthodoxy, and this gave weight to the later utterances of her bishops. The Eutychian controversy was settled by the Council of Chalcedon upon the basis of a letter written by Leo I, Bishop of Rome; that is, the orthodox Christology was defined by the council according to the positions advanced in this epistle.⁶

Tradition inevitably figured more or less in the discussions of the early Fathers, and from being regarded as a source of supplementary truth, it came to be viewed as coincident with the Scripture content.⁷ The debates in the councils made large use of tradition, placing it upon a parity with Scrip-

⁵ "The Gospel and the Church," p. 150.

⁶ Newman, "Church History," Vol. I, p. 344.

⁷ Harnack, "History of Dogma," Vol. III, p. 218.

ture as a source of authoritative teaching. As a related doctrine, there developed the teaching of continued inspiration; that inspiration did not cease with the apostolic age, but was enjoyed by the Fathers of the church when assembled in council. Tradition was a growing entity, the criteria of which were, as fixed by Vincent of Lerins, *antiquitas universitas* and *consensio*.⁸ In the age of scholasticism the authority of the Bible was gradually overshadowed by tradition. The Tridentine Creed pronounced unequivocally upon the equal authority of tradition with the Scriptures.

It was to be expected that the authority of the pope should experience development and receive fresh definition with the progress of centuries. From being upon an equality with other bishops, the Bishop of Rome became the vicar of St. Peter and a universal bishop; became the vicar of Christ and the channel of episcopal authority; became more and more the supreme legislative authority; became in time the infallible source of doctrinal authority.⁹ Councils became at length entirely subsidiary, and lost their power to control the pope, even lost their desire to assert a theoretical independence and superiority. Tradition is at length embodied in the pope himself; that is, one can no longer appeal from the pope to tradition, for "the pope creates tradition," and this tradition "is Christ himself

⁸ Hagenbach, "History of Doctrines," Vol. I, p. 325.

⁹ Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 352.

reincarnate from generation to generation in the historic church, which is his body, and carrying on through all the ages a perpetual ministry of mediation and revelation.”¹⁰ This dogma of papal infallibility was logically implicit in the Roman Church doctrine long before it was made explicit by the Vatican Council. Aquinas approved of it on the ground of the prayer of Christ for Peter that his faith might not fail, and the Dominicans adopted this view.

There had thus arisen a massive and complicated institution called the Church, in whose hands lay the “power of the keys,” and to whose teaching and ordinances implicit obedience was believed to be due. The right of private judgment was denied. The Council of Trent simply decreed what had been Catholic opinion for generations when it declared that “if any one should have the temerity to read or possess (the Bible) without . . . written permission, he shall not receive absolution until he have first delivered up such Bible to the ordinary.”¹¹ But why might not the common man own and read a Bible without infringing any ecclesiastical function? Simply because if he is not possessed of the interpretation of the Book, which no ordinary layman does possess, “more evil than good will arise from it.” The common man is incapable of interpreting the Bible, therefore he ought not to read it.

¹⁰ Sabatier, “Religions of Authority,” p. 66.

¹¹ Fisher, “History of the Reformation,” p. 530.

The Reformation was, in part at least, a re-assertion of the right of private judgment. It was also a transfer of allegiance from the church to the Bible as the seat of ultimate authority. In the debates between Protestants and Catholics during the early Reformation period, Protestants refused to yield to any but scriptural arguments, while representatives of the Roman Church appealed constantly to tradition. Luther preserved this attitude in his conference with Cajetan, in the disputation at Leipsic, before the Diet at Worms; Zwingli did the same in his disputation at Zurich and in his writings; this too is the method of Calvin in his "Institutes."¹² Protestant Confessions asserted that the Old and New Testaments are "the only safe source of religious knowledge, and constitute the sole norm of faith,"¹³ and allowed the right of interpretation to every seeker after salvation, conceding to the Bible the power to be its own interpreter. "The *Analogia Fidei* and the aid of the Holy Spirit were acknowledged as the guides in interpreting Scripture."¹⁴

That the early Reformers recognized the paramount authority of the Scriptures is abundantly attested by evidence both direct and indirect. It is the implicate of all Luther's denials of the au-

¹² Hagenbach, "History of Doctrines," Vol. II, p. 217.

¹³ Hagenbach, *ut supra*, Vol. II, p. 217. The Reformed Confessions are particularly strong in their assertion of the supremacy of the sacred Scriptures (*Sacra Scriptura*).

¹⁴ Winer, p. 37; quoted by Hagenbach, Vol. II, p. 222.

thority of the pope;¹⁵ it is a correlate of his explicit statement that councils may err; it is the substance of many a direct assertion. This is equally true of Calvin, of Zwingli, of Knox, that they exhibit an entire appreciation of the Bible as the formal principle of the Christian faith. At the same time, the attitude of the Reformers toward the Bible was characteristically one of freedom. This is evidenced, for example, in Luther's opinion concerning the relations in which the Gospels stand to each other, in his estimate of the Epistle of James, of the book of Revelation, of the superiority of First Peter. There is enough of subjective criticism in his preface to the New Testament to warrant the appellation later accorded him of "father of modern subjective criticism."¹⁶ To quote a brief passage, he says: "St. John's Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and St. Peter's First Epistle—these are the books which show to thee Christ, and teach everything that it is necessary and blessed for thee to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' Epistle is a perfect straw-epistle compared with them, for it has in it nothing of an evangelic kind." Of Genesis, he says, "What matter if Moses did not write it?" It is evident that Luther's doctrine of justification

¹⁵ Fisher, "History of the Reformation," p. 279.

¹⁶ Newman, "Church History," Vol. II, p. 68.

by faith was a sort of critical standard of which he made free use in determining the relative values of different portions of the Bible. Calvin will not have us depend for our conviction of the authority of the Bible upon external proofs, much less upon the church. The testimony within us of the same Spirit who inspired the writers is a sufficient basis. While Calvin is less free than Luther in his opinions regarding inspiration and the canon, he is frank in the admission of discrepancies and difficulties in interpretation. For example, how "Jeremiah" got into Matt. 27:9, instead of Zechariah, he does not know, nor will he worry himself about it (*nec anxie laboro*).¹⁷ Zwingli held that the Bible is the rule of faith. He held that all the New Testament books are canonical, except the Apocalypse; this he declared, at the Disputation at Berne in 1529, "not a biblical book." All the Reformers were a unit in the belief that the Bible is self-authenticating, though they variously asserted this conviction. Perhaps Harnack puts it as well as it can be expressed when he says: "Protestantism reckons on the gospel being something so simple, so divine, and therefore so truly human, as to be most certain of being understood when it is left entirely free, and also as to produce essentially the same experiences and convictions in individual souls."¹⁸ It is certain that the Reformers recognized the human as well

¹⁷ Fisher, "History of the Reformation," p. 299.

¹⁸ Harnack, "What is Christianity?" p. 295.

as the divine element in the Scriptures, but the later Protestant scholasticism represented a recession from their free attitude toward the Book.

This period of Protestant scholasticism Sabatier calls "Catholicism transposed."¹⁹ The term "word of God" now comes to mean something other than it did to the Reformers. With them, as the author just quoted says, "it was the shout of a soul saved from sin and death," while with their successors "the same proposition became an abstract theorem."²⁰ Inspiration comes now to be thought of as supernatural dictation, and was defined as embracing three *momenta*: (1) *impulsus ad scribendum*, (2) *suggestio rerum*, and (3) *suggestio verborum*.²¹ The *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, which never had acceptance outside the Swiss Confederacy, and within its limits for only a bare fifty years,²² went so far as to declare the inspiration of the Hebrew vowel-points.²³ As to alleged barbarisms, solecisms, faults of declension, syntax, etc., orthodoxy asserted that "The style of holy Scripture is tainted by no grammatical vice, nor any barbarism or solecism."²⁴ It was not alone the Swiss authors of the Consensus who maintained that the Hebrew vowel-points were original, such Lutheran theologians as Gerhard, Quenstedt, Hollaz,

¹⁹ "Religions of Authority," p. 154.

²⁰ Sabatier, *ut supra*, p. 175.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²² Fisher, "History of Doctrine," p. 345.

²³ See text of this declaration, Hagenbach, Vol. II, p. 231.

²⁴ Sabatier, *ut supra*, p. 179.

and others, advanced the same view.²⁵ Hagenbach makes a very apt statement when he remarks in a footnote that it is evident "how much this mere watching and guarding of a dead treasure is in accord with the lifeless notions of God, and the relation in which he stands to the world," entertained by these pious theologians.

What wonder that there should be protest against this crystallizing view upon the part of Arminian theologians, such as Grotius, Limborch, Episcopius, and others! In this protest, and basing upon nearly the same arguments, the Socinians followed. But for dominant theology the Bible had now come to be regarded as a manual of proof-texts for doctrine, the whole of it upon the same dead level of high inspiration and thus liable to more or less indiscriminate use. The free attitude of criticism is heresy, and heresy damns. At the extremity of its arc the Protestant pendulum had entered a region of bondage not less absolute in its denial of the right of private judgment than was that Catholicism which it abhorred. In the very nature of the case no such rigid view could long hold the ascendancy. With the revocation of the Helvetic Confession (the Formula Consensus) in 1723, the first and third of the *momenta* of inspiration alleged by Protestant scholasticism disappear from theological definition, and the second (*suggestio rerum*) is "reduced to a simple direc-

²⁵ Hagenbach, Vol. II, p. 231.

tion of the intelligence and memory which preserved the sacred writers from serious error.”²⁶ But while such extreme views have never since been widely held or taught, Protestantism has always continued to bear the brand of the Protestant scholastics. It was Lessing who cried out, “O Luther, thou hast delivered us from the yoke of tradition! Who shall deliver us from the yoke of thy letter?”²⁷

²⁶ Sabatier, “Religions of Authority,” p. 200.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Part III
Constructive

I

THE BIBLE

PROTESTANT creeds were based upon a formal acknowledgment of the supreme authority of the Scriptures.¹ But there was a wide range of opinion as to the significance of that authority, and it was a far cry from Luther to the Protestant scholastics. Luther could say: "If sometimes there mingled in hay, straw, and wood, and not solely silver, gold, and precious stones, nevertheless the foundation abides while the fire consumes the rest."² To the elder Turretin such a statement must have seemed little short of blasphemous, for the Bible was to him "a supernatural communication of doctrines guaranteed to be divine by the miraculous mode of their origin,"³ and as all—even to the Hebrew vowel-points—upon the same dead level of authoritativeness.

Which view shall modern Protestantism accept? Can it accept either solely upon the authority which originally vouched for it? Must it not the rather canvass the whole question in the light of modern

¹ Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 18.

² "Tischreden."

³ Foster, "Finality of the Christian Religion," p. 57.

historical knowledge till it find a rational answer to the question what the Bible is? "All the theological energy of the eighteenth century concentrated itself upon the task of producing and exhibiting evidences sufficient to show that Christianity ought to be believed to be true. . . They (the theologians) labored to shut men up to receive the Bible in the lump, as it were, notwithstanding their necessary ignorance of its essential nature, because . . . guaranteed to have come from God by the miracles and prophecies recorded in the Bible."⁴ Even modern theologians have not wholly abandoned this method. But let the seeker after truth confine himself first to the question how the Bible actually came together as just the book it is, no more and no less. If he is too strongly impelled at this juncture by the momentum of traditional opinion, he is likely to find that question of "no more and no less" somewhat puzzling. The scholastic theologians of the Reformation and their modern successors have never conclusively answered that very natural query, "Why?" After recourse to the annals of councils, the lists and recorded opinions of church Fathers, the explicit declarations of Church Confessions, and all other available data, the inquirer will doubtless still be wondering. But if to his appeal to history he add a direct appeal to the books themselves, he will bear away at least two distinct impressions: First, that the books owe their rise and

⁴ Flint, "Agnosticism," p. 549.

form to definite local and occasional influences, and, secondly, that they owe their present juxtaposition as constituting the Bible to various historically traceable currents of life. In other words, he will note, whatever else may be said, that the Bible is a thoroughly human book.

We may be quite sure that these facts, having once developed, will never again be lost to view. They were implicit in the attitude of Christians of the first and second centuries toward the New Testament, in the attitude of Luther and others of the early Reformers; but they have now become explicit through the application of the historical method to biblical studies. But the question how the Bible came together in its present form lies only at the threshold of inquiry. Having made sure that the various books of the Bible belong to a context of real life and thought, now rapidly coming into our possession through the labors of biblical scholars, being assured that they came together as separate entities both by the development of earlier literary, legal, and historical elements, and by the recension of the documents themselves, the more searching question is, "Why should they continue in this juxtaposition as a sacred book?" They have the same right to their juxtaposition as other books to which no aspect of sacredness is imputed, but upon what ground, in view of their admitted literary history, can their claim to unique authority be justified? How can they be in any true sense a sacred

volume? To be sure the Bible is a collection of almost priceless historical and literary memoirs—priceless to the antiquarian, to the historian, to the student of literature or of ethics; though the books are to be judged individually and variously valued even for these ends.

But when we have said this have we said all that can be said? Is there some further and conclusive reason why people who are not students of antiquities of history, of literature, or of ethics, primarily, should continue to make use of the Bible? Have these books some unique quality of religiousness by virtue of which they will continue to constitute the Christian Bible?

This is a wider question than the mere issue of *the* canon; it is a question of *a* canon. Upon the former question, as Marcus Dods points out, if you ask a Romanist why certain books are canonical, he has a ready answer: "He accepts these books because the church bids him do so";⁵ but the Protestant has no ready answer, probably no answer at all. If this is true of the mere question of the canonicity of a particular book, how much more is it true if you press the Protestant for the ultimate reason why any book should be lined off from the common body of literature as sacred. Luther said to Eck that the church could not "give more authority or force to a book than it has in itself," nor a council make that to be Scripture which in its own

⁵ "The Bible: Its Origin and Nature," Chap. II.

nature is not Scripture.⁶ Very well, then it must be something within—some unique quality which renders the book self-authenticating.⁷ If there is such to be discovered in each of the books, what is it? Can it be the same quality in Esther, or Ecclesiastes, or the Song of Solomon, as in the four Gospels? In the latter we discover the delineation of a Personality so unique as by reflex to render the books unique; but what of the former? If it is this high moral level, whether of individual character or of collective atmosphere, then some of our books will inevitably plunge us again into debate. We shall end by having officially just what most Christians have actually—a Bible within the Bible.

But we are following a false clew when we expect any single uniform quality to serve as determinant. To segregate the books and make inquiry of any separate volume for the force which it has in itself is to pursue a mistaken method. No wonder that Luther failed to find in some books, even of the New Testament, that high quality for which he was seeking and which he believed the unvarying touchstone of inspiration! That which discovers itself to the user of the historical method is not some single, lofty, all-pervasive quality, but the simple fact that the volume in question has integral relation to the life of that people, God's dealings with whom themselves constitute the revelation. In

⁶ "The Bible: Its Origin and Nature," Chap. II.

⁷ "The Bible: Its Origin and Nature," p. 38.

short, the revelation is not a literary phenomenon, but is primarily a vital fact; it is a revelation in life, of which the Bible is but the record. It is not contended that this canon is of easy application; there are certain high portions of the Bible to which its application is simple and self-evidencing, but there are other portions where it is difficult and even doubtful. Yet it is the only legitimate canon. Speaking of the formation of the canon and not of this more fundamental question, Dods says: "I should be disposed to say that the two attributes which give canonicity are congruity with the main end of revelation and direct historical connection with the revelation of God in history."⁸

But is God done with his "revelation in history"? If not, what of the idea of a "closed canon"? Practically, to be sure, the canon is closed. No considerable body of Christians cares to contest the fact; yet the speculative question always remains: "What would you do if some absolutely authenticated Gospel or Pauline epistle were to get itself discovered?" Why should not the New Testament be printed with indication that there are gaps in the revelation—for example, where Paul's Epistle to the Laodiceans is lacking? On any theory of a merely dictated, infallible, divine book it ought to be. Otherwise, the theory is sheer absurdity. "Let the composite Bible stand and be used as what it is. We need not increase it or diminish it . . . for us the real sacred-

⁸ Dods, "The Bible: Its Origin and Nature," p. 54.

ness of the book is due to its quality and its relation to Christian truth, not to its authorship or its external attestation.”⁹ Of course we shall not change it! But the very standards which Dods accepts themselves do away with a “closed canon”—a canon somehow settled by divine fiat. The history of the “closing” of the canon, so far as we know it, powerfully supports such a conclusion.

The principles of historicity and congruity thus accepted as regulating canonicity are principles which we must further acknowledge in the use which we make of the “canonical.” It will not do, once having decided that the book ought to be in the Bible, to treat it as if it were the same as every other book, or as any other book, in the Bible. Its only apparent use may be a negative one, ethical only by way of historical contrast; it may be word of God or word of man, or even word of devil, and must be discriminated and evaluated as just what it is. This being true, the Bible delivers its illumined truth to me, only as it is properly interpreted; it is not a book of explicit and detailed directions, a sort of heavenly manual of etiquette; it is not even a book of principles alone; it is rather the literary embodiment of God’s providential dealings with men in certain of their aspects. The principles are embodied in these providential dealings; and while they are sometimes made explicit in an uttered prophetic or apostolic maxim, or in

⁹ Clarke, “Sixty Years with the Bible,” p. 237.

a saying of Jesus, they are more often implicit in the course of history, and the unfolding of personal life recorded in the book. This makes the highest use of the Bible by no means an easy use; yet it is the only use which can develop the legitimate authoritativeness of the book. Even the words of Jesus, which come to us as of highest authority, have long been subject to interpretation, as though they could not be understood without. The most pious of Christians have freely indulged in this business of making them mean what they must mean when it seems uncertain what they do mean. It is thus, as Sabatier says, "impossible to transform the words of Jesus into an infallible and undebatable code."¹⁰ And this is true whether one follow Sabatier in rejecting the infallibility of Jesus himself¹¹ or ground his conclusion upon the fallibility of the record and the occasional nature of many of the sayings. The whole Bible, including both the life and the sayings of Jesus, must submit to interpretation. Whether the interpreting authority be the church or ecumenical and individual reason—both illumined by the Holy Spirit—we do not now determine.

Theories of inspiration have had immense weight in determining the measure of authority to be accorded the Bible and, what is more to the point here, the kind of authority to be attributed to it. Up to

¹⁰ "Religions of Authority," p. 233.

¹¹ *Ut supra*, p. 232f.

the time of the Reformation the church sufficed for everything; but with the rejection of the authority of the church there came the substitution of the authority of the Scriptures. Until after the Reformation also there was no fully defined church theory of inspiration, but now it became necessary to define the new authority in such way that its rights should be safeguarded, and the Protestant churches supplied with a sufficient basis for its confident appeal to the Scriptures. It is quite possible to believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures without holding to any rigid theory, and this is what the church did until the time of the Protestant scholastics. If one is to hold a theory of inspiration, it must be only such a theory as can be described by the term of which Professor Sanday makes use—"inductive," and it will have to be a pretty elastic theory to account for all the phenomena of the Bible. It is even a question whether the term applies with propriety in any primary sense to writings; it is men who are inspired, but not to become divine amanuenses, mechanically producing dictated revelations.

But it is better to come straight to the Bible without any theory of inspiration, and from the Bible itself attempt to gain an answer to our question. The measure and kind of its authority will stand revealed in relation of the various aspects of the book itself, and not apart from its phenomena. Men were wont to say, basing upon high notions of

inspiration, even before they had taken the testimony of the facts into account, that this Bible is infallible. But what have the facts shown? The Reformers claimed for the Bible all that the church had claimed for itself; but "Criticism," says Professor Gwatkin, "has demolished alike the Catholic assumption of an infallible church and the Protestant assumption of an infallible book."¹² The use of the historical method has shown that the book emanates from many sources, from many eras of thought; that it is colored by many dominant ideas, and controlled by various ruling ideals. It is history, prophecy, saga, song, proverb, parable, personal reminiscence, biography, apocalypse; it is progress, continual progress—with apostasy too, the while—of which it is the record, and the very lesson of progress is that what went before was fallible, was, at any rate, insufficient and needed superseding. Surely that principle denies infallibility to all but the culminations of the book. Even when one touches the sacred region of Jesus' life and works, the question is up and will not be brushed aside. Shall we not be obliged to acknowledge with Professor Sanday¹³ that "limitations of knowledge might be and were assumed along with other limitations by Him who was in all things made like unto his brethren, though without sin"? To be sure, limitation is not fallibility, but it allows the infer-

¹² "Knowledge of God," II, p. 289.

¹³ Sanday, "Inspiration," p. 415.

ence that there might be more to be said upon some subjects with which the Saviour dealt. This is not the place to deal with this question at length, though it has its important bearing upon the question under discussion.

It is in its ethical and religious aspects that the Bible is unique, and most of all in its culminating and revealing Personality—Jesus. It does not profess to be a manual of geology or of astronomy or of anthropology; the methods of its historiographers are not uniform, and almost wholly unintelligible to the modern mind; its legal and ethical codes are not always consistent when considered upon a dead level of authority. The book is evidently the reflex of the times which gave its portions birth, and faithfully shadows forth the temper, customs, ideals, limitations of the persons and ages concerned. One might excerpt considerable portions of it from which he would be entirely unable to determine that God had spoken; these portions find whatever significance they possess in the light of other culminating portions with which they are associated. “We are most of us ready to admit that false standards have been set up; that an infallibility in non-essentials has been demanded which the Bible never claims, and which, if it existed, would render it less fitted for its end.” “We are beginning to see that we may grant that the sacred writers were not scientific historians, not philosophers or men of science, not experts in the method

of scientific exegesis or literary criticism,"¹⁴ and yet keep our faith that God has spoken to us in his Son, who is the culmination of these memorials, and that here we have a sufficient guide of life and an assuring record of the grace of God in ages past. Read without prejudice, the Bible will vindicate its own right to speak, and will awe and compel as no other book can; but this is due to the truth embodied in the record, and not to some mysterious externally attested authority obtruding itself upon the reader. "The burden of the book is the gradual manifestation of God to man, until he shows himself in the face of Jesus Christ. The book presents Christ, and that in so real and hearty a way that the reader can come to him, believe in him, and be transformed by him."¹⁵ Or, as Dr. W. N. Clarke puts it: "It is certain that the Bible gives us the knowledge of Jesus, and that Jesus gives us knowledge of God, and that God, as Jesus reveals him, is the true light of life. Our sacred book is thus our guide to Jesus, to God, and to life divine."¹⁶

It is absurd to talk of the Bible being superseded while men are constituted as they are. It will always have as its function the portrayal of God's dealings with men, and chiefly the portrayal of Jesus and his relations to men. No other book can bring him to the consciousness of the church as does

¹⁴ Fisher, "History of Doctrine," p. 548; quotation from Lewis F. Stearns.

¹⁵ R. F. Horton, "My Belief," p. 119.

¹⁶ "Sixty Years with the Bible," p. 253.

the Bible; no other body of documents can give the historic background to that revelation, or the immediate historic consequences flowing from it, as does the Bible. And, since revelation lies in the vital realities of God's dealings with men, of which the book is but the record, the principles disclosed in those dealings have, when justly understood, a certain normative value; particularly is this normative value self-evident in the life of Jesus, in the conception of his person mediated to the believer. Herein lies the authoritativeness of the Bible; herein its mediate authority is undisputed and indisputable: if we are ever to come to the Christ of reality and not to a Christ of vagary and fancy, we must come by way of the book. But this authoritativeness of the book is something far other than Protestant scholasticism supposed, not an authoritativeness of the letter, but of the Spirit. "God has willed that we should search for the thought of Christ, as for his own, in that rendering of it which men have left for us, upon our personal responsibility—that is to say, in full liberty, and with all the energy of our faculties."¹⁷ There is no authority attaching to the Bible which relieves one who uses it from the necessity of applying the best available canons of judgment in the evaluation of its contents; nowhere does the book absolve the Christian from the duty of discrimination. But its mediate spiritual authority will always authenticate itself.

¹⁷ Sabatier, "Religions of Authority," p. 260.

II

REASON

TO define the function of reason in religion is also to determine the authority of reason in religion. Is there anything left for reason to do? Or is everything so predetermined that only a somewhat external and mechanical response devolves upon the individual Christian? Such is far from being the total Christian consciousness of to-day. But, even if it were true with us, the records of historic Christianity take us back to a time when things were not thus explicit and determined, to a time when, in the very center of original Christianity—the church at Jerusalem—there was the shock and noise of contending opinion, and this touching the most vital matters of the Christian faith. This same riot of contending judgments continued throughout the period during which the historic ecumenical creeds were forming; so that, even though it had been possible to found a church with all its doctrine explicit, it becomes very evident that only thus has the Christian church come to be what it is.

By reason we mean primarily the power of dis-

criminating values and of excogitating relations and ends. One may begin his study of the function of reason in the Christian religion with the New Testament itself. The whole attitude of Jesus upon the relation of men to himself turns upon the use to be made of this power of discrimination; parable derives its value from the ability of those who hear at once to make logical inference and application; the very fact that Jesus taught, instead of merely instituting a ceremonial, argues the validity of an appeal to that total mental process which we call reason. If one passes from the Founder to the greatest exponent of Christianity, he finds himself in the midst of argument, constantly called upon to discriminate reasons, always under the necessity of judging. Paul makes use of a great variety of expressions denoting this general mode of mental activity, expressions which stand for such activity itself, or imply a previous engagement therein. Some of these expressions are: *λογίζομαι*, "a favorite word with the apostle . . . being used (exclusive of quotations) some twenty-seven times in his epistles and only four times in the rest of the New Testament";¹ *δοκιμάζω*; *Φρονέω*; *νομίζω*; *δοκέω*, etc. Let one take up the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and he at once becomes aware that he is in the midst of argument. Let one study the reports of Paul's addresses which we have in the Acts, and it is evi-

¹ Thayer, "Lex.," p. 379.

dent how large a use of reason that great preacher made in his appeals.

There was great freedom in the use of reason in the days of the early Christian philosophers from Origen to Augustine. They did not hesitate, particularly the earlier among them, to combine "natural" and "revealed" truth; nor did they discern any great schism between Christian truth and truth in the great pagan systems with which they were familiar. It is singularly refreshing to note how free Origen was in this, though he accepted the rule that nothing contrary to the Christian Scriptures was to be received.² But when once the church, by its ecumenical use of reason, had developed a body of doctrine and had stamped it with authority, this early freedom died out. Piety, not reason, became the door of knowledge. This process reached its culmination in scholasticism, which though it believed itself the age of reason, was in reality the despair of reason. The problem was not: Given the facts from whatever source, synthesize and explicate the truth; but, Given orthodoxy (Bible + tradition), show its reasonableness and logical necessity. This was a decidedly limited exercise of reason, but it was a perilous thing for the church thus to set reason to work, even with so limited a charter. Abelard stood for the emancipation of reason, and endeavored to show that the truth which reason universally acknowledges,

² Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 105.

and the moral laws known even to the heathen, are in harmony with the divine revelation, which but enlarges and confirms them.³

The typical scholastic position bound the church until the Reformation, which was, in certain aspects, a revolt of reason. Yet Reformation theology did not carry this principle to its logical conclusion. Thought was soon bound by orthodoxy. To the Socinians belongs the honor of challenging the right of dogma to exclude the application of reason to any subject where it can be applied. They "set exegesis free from the trammels of dogmatic theology."⁴ They entered without hesitation provinces of thought and investigation which the orthodox theologians had refrained from entering because of the force of tradition. In this they were followed by the Arminians, of whom Schleiermacher says, "The Arminian principle which renounced the authority of the symbolical books gave such an impulse to exegetical investigation, to independent hermeneutical labors, and to the speculative treatment of theology, that in consequence of the influence exerted by the works of Episcopius and Hugo Grotius, it was introduced into the whole evangelical church. Thus a general desire manifested itself in the Protestant church of Germany, to do away with the authority of the symbolical books."⁵ This came about at length with all the

³ Hagenbach, "History of Doctrine," I, p. 252.

⁴ Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 325.

⁵ "Kirchengeschichte," p. 620.

Protestant bodies in greater or less degree. This rise of speculative philosophy, the enlargement of the borders of knowledge, the amplification of scholarship, the Aufklärung with its tendency to replace positive dogma with natural religion, culminate in the exercise of the right of "criticizing the positive and traditional element (the evangelical history), and in rationalizing the supernatural."⁶ In historical succession the poet Lessing criticized Christianity with freedom and held to its perfectibility;⁷ the philosopher Schelling taught that the entire history of men is a revelation,⁸ while a disciple of the latter, applying his philosophy to theology, taught that not only history, but natural history belongs to the province of divine revelation.⁹ These names are but examples taken almost at random from one great current of thought about religion—a current which flows on in our own time quite undiminished, if sometimes deflected from its wonted course.

The limits of this study prevent even the most cursory survey of present tendencies. Enough has been brought to attention to show conclusively that Christianity cannot hope to escape the scrutiny of human thought. And if in the beginning it gladly made its appeal to reason—though not to reason alone, but through reason to the whole personality—there seems no just ground for fear, now

⁶ Schwegeler, "History of Philosophy," p. 209 (Stirling's translation).

⁷ Hagenbach, II, p. 405.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

that reason claims the right to pass Christianity under review. It is the intellect which has made Christianity explicit to every age in the terms of its own thinking. This is involved in the discrimination of terms by which to translate the Bible from one language to another; it is involved still more in all revision of text; but especially is it involved in the whole process of interpretation, whether in the appeal of the primitive Christian preacher to some Gentile audience or in the formal statements of the modern systematic theologian.

There are two facts which make imperative the use of reason in the mediation of Christianity to our own times: First, the Scriptures do not give us a religious system as such; vastly more is implicit than is explicit; from concrete cases and particular sayings general principles of action must be deduced; secondly, the Christianity of a former generation, whether the first or the latest, expresses its faith in terminology most intimately related to the dominant ideas of the time, and must needs be translated if it shall represent the faith of a succeeding generation. These two factors are most intimately related in the actual progress of both faith and doctrine. Because of the former, creeds were inevitable; because of the latter, creeds fail at length to represent the faith of the church, and are superseded. Because of both, he who would follow Jesus must learn to think.

The same arguments which justify dogma jus-

tify also the revision and restatement of dogmas. Sabatier says: "It is impossible for thought not to manifest itself organically in rites and doctrines. In apostolic times the greatest missionaries were the greatest theologians. . . A church without dogmas would be a sterile plant. The church has a pedagogic mission that could not be fulfilled without it. But pedagogic authority is neither absolute nor eternal; it has a double limit in the nature of the pupil's soul, and in the end it would attain."¹⁰ But he again remarks that "Orthodoxy mistakes in arresting the metamorphosis to which dogma—like all living things—is subject"; and for the reason that such metamorphosis is essential. Doctrine bears a certain analogy to language. Language changes by (1) disuse, (2) by words changing their meaning, (3) by the renaissance of old or the creation of new words. So also with the terminology of dogmas. Examples are not wanting; the Reformation brought about a resuscitation of justification by faith and the universal priesthood of believers; it broke with the authority of the church, substituting the internal principle of experience (and, later, the external principle of the "word of God"); the old cosmogonies can no longer figure in church doctrine and teaching; last of all, the historical method is turning and overturning the traditional view of human history."¹¹

¹⁰ "Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion," Book III, Chap. 1.

¹¹ See Sabatier, "Philosophy of Religion," Book III, Chap. 3.

Christianity has its historical basis in a certain distinctive view of life and group of doctrines concerning it, as truly as in the person of Jesus. Professor Van Dyke very properly insists that "If his heart is to be the norm of our feeling, his mind is to be the norm of our thinking."¹² . His teaching is as much an objective fact as his life and character. . . The importance which Jesus ascribed to his words as the authoritative revelation of unseen verities to the confused and darkened mind of men cannot be overlooked." It is also true, as he remarks, that Jesus' teaching "is not entangled with any system of thought or logic";¹³ but, at the same time, the teaching of Jesus was pregnant with yet unborn truth, and it was inevitable that both his person and his teachings should become the food of later Christian thought and the fabric of later Christian teaching. Both the facts about Jesus and the words which fell from his lips were necessarily subject to interpretation. "Christianity is constituted . . . by the facts understood in one specific manner," says Doctor Warfield. If we "strip the facts free from dogma, from that interpretation which has transformed them into doctrine, what have we left at the most but this: that once upon a time a man was born who lived in poverty and charity, died on the cross and rose again (and even these 'facts' could not pass unchallenged)!"¹⁴

¹² "The Gospel for an Age of Doubt," p. 174f.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁴ "Presbyterian and Reformed Review," July, 1896, p. 426.

While this is true, it is also historically demonstrable that the doctrine of the church has been a development. Upon how many more points, for example, does the Westminster Confession pass than does the Apostles' Creed? The former presupposes all the long and varied life of Christianity, with its crises of belief and practice; the latter builds directly upon the Christian faith current in apostolic times. With its emphasis upon the divine sovereignty and doctrines proceeding therefrom, the Confession has a theological perspective manifestly differing from that of the primitive creed. Not only has there been dogmatic progress, there has been dogmatic revision, though this factor in development has been most notable in the period since the completion of the historic Confessions of the Christian church. This period "may be described, in a general way, as aiming to conform the theological system to the conclusions of scientific inquiry and criticism, or to bring into unity and harmony the knowledge derived from revelation and that ascertained through man's natural powers. It is the modern era in which we are now living."¹⁵ In this connection the words of the late R. W. Dale¹⁶ are significant: "When the Reformers undertook the task of constructing a theology for the Reformed churches, the intellectual revolution which began with the Renaissance was incomplete—

¹⁵ Fisher, "History of Christian Doctrine," p. 18.

¹⁶ "The Evangelical Revival and Other Sermons," p. 19.

it is not complete yet—and while they made immense and salutary changes in the dogmas of the church by a constant appeal to the authority of the Holy Scripture, their method was still powerfully influenced by the decaying scholasticism. There were other causes which gave their work a provisional character. Indeed, all work of this kind is necessarily but for a time; it has to be done over again whenever any great changes have taken place in the intellectual condition of Christendom. Such changes have plainly been going on very rapidly for the last three hundred years. It looks as if we had almost escaped from the philosophical methods which still retained much of their authority in the time of the Reformers. If the intellectual revolution is approaching its term, the process of reconstructing our theological systems will soon have to be gone through again.”

Those who have felt the pulse of recent theology know full well that this crisis of reconstruction is already upon it; every recent theological treatise bears witness to the fact, for it either contends earnestly for “the faith once delivered to the saints,” or makes concessions to the “new theology.” Listen to these words from one whose thinking is virile and whose language is incisive: “Our faculty of growth is the innovator; it denies finality. The history of Christian doctrine would serve as illustration of this. Let us, out of the mass of them, choose that which during the

first Christian centuries was the greatest controversy of all—the controversy which culminated in the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, and finally in the Athanasian Creed—that on the doctrine of the person of Christ. We remember on this subject the remark made by a theological professor to the effect that the discussions of the early church which resulted in the creeds had so completely threshed out the whole subject that they had left nothing more to be said. The remark struck us as one of the strangest we had heard for many a day. Nothing more to be said, when the cosmic ideas on which these early disputants based their judgments have been to a vast extent modified by science; when their conclusions were founded on notions of *substance* and *personality* which to-day the veriest tyro in philosophy would repudiate? One might as well declare to be final the judgments on the heavenly bodies of the star-gazers who lived before the age of telescopes, of spectrum analysis, and of modern chemistry.”¹⁷ Possibly the case is overstated, but there is so much truth in the view that it cannot be ignored. Perhaps if we were to see in dogma only the tentative, if necessary, conclusions of Christian thought—conclusions in no sense prohibiting the further exercise of reverent reason with view to restatement or fresh appreciating of the underlying reality—it would lead to an even higher evaluation of the dogmatic than

¹⁷ J. Brierly, “Sidelights on Religion,” p. 189.

any doctrine of its finality could. We are obliged to affirm that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; the fact does not change, however much what we apprehend of it may increase or diminish. The general truth of the transcendency of Jesus, which the ecumenical creeds would safeguard, was a living fact to Christian experience before there were any creeds; and if the creeds were lost—as conceivably they might be—there would have to be a fresh appreciation in terms of this assured transcendency of Jesus. The intellectual temper of the modern mind would not permit it to be otherwise. The underlying facts of the Christian history and of Christian experience are a unity; they are unchanging realities. But a little experience combined with some sense of the true perspective of historical theology forbids us to think that interpretations of the fundamental facts are themselves unchanging. It is probably true that the great lines of interpretation are more or less easily to be discerned very early in the history of Christian thinking about the facts, and true also that they tend to become more rather than less prominent, to persist in all just and reasonable views. It could not be otherwise, since nothing is known otherwise than by the marks which constitute it. Yet at the same time, any personality so profound as Jesus, and system so inclusive as the Christian system, must be capable of being viewed in part and from various angles; indeed, it could hardly hope for

complete and final explication and interpretation from any single mind or age. History attests that, with general concurrence of view, there has been neither one single and final view of doctrine since the beginning of Christian church life, nor a gradual and equal evolution of doctrine. Views have varied with great thinkers, and crises have hastened to meet them; theology has waited upon science, upon philosophy, and has experienced the throes of revolution in their train. Doctrine, from being the resultant of thought, becomes food for thought and subject to the transmutations of all things temporal.

It is a gracious fact that we are able to go back to the beginning for ourselves—back to the Christian beginning. This we may do through the narratives of the New Testament, and this we must do, no matter how adequate a dogmatic we may have. It is incumbent upon every new generation of believers to build its own doctrinal structure; and this it can never do in bold *a priori* fashion, but always in the full light not only of the foundation facts, but of what Christians in other ages have thought about them, and always in the full light of experience. Happily for them, the great mass of believers have never been greatly troubled about the formulas of their faith, though they have always been willing to die for the reality of it. Even where the formula has obtruded upon the privacy of individual opinion, it has been found capable of such interpretation as to make its insistence bearable.

This fact was never more evident than to-day. There is no great disposition to combat creeds and Confessions. There they stand; they are historic, they have their rights; let them stand for what they may. They represent thought, soul-travail, blood; they were seriously wrought out and in good faith. But unless ecumenical councils and church convocations are specially inspired, they can scarcely confer such authority upon the product of their thinking as thereby to make it final. It is final for us if logical acumen cannot overtake it, if Christian experience does not undermine it, if freshly discovered fact does not render its retention as an expression of our faith an anachronism.

Some serious souls—not a few indeed—have keenly felt the apparent contradiction between those “Christian verities which, once secured for the human race, cannot by any lapse of time be rendered obsolete,”¹⁸ and “the fact that theological thought follows the laws which govern the evolution of all other thought.” We may well be reminded, however, that what is true here is true also of our total experience. The ultimate factors of personal life continue the same as in primitive ages; the normal may have come further into light, but can scarcely be more “normal” than it has always been. Yet the psychology of the first quarter of the twentieth century bears but little likeness to ancient modes of describing the phenomena of the soul’s

¹⁸ Balfour, “The Foundations of Belief,” p. 280.

activities. Scarcely any form of statement but the axiomatic is above challenge; and even if it were, no sort of authority could make the same formula (other than axiomatic) mean the same thing to two successive generations. Each generation is under obligation to pass on to the next not an infallible summation of Christian truth, but rather the Christian facts and its own best endeavor to interpret them. Balfour is of the opinion that science and ethics, as well as theology "are the trustees of statements which ought to be preserved unchanged through all revolutions of scientific and ethical theory."¹⁹ A distinction is to be made between a belief accepted only "at the conclusion of some inferential process," and a belief which is the occasion of such a process; the former will stand or fall with the process; the latter, if the process is shown invalid, will at once begin devising a new theory. Possibly the fact of atonement ministered as truly to the spiritual necessities of men who held the Anselmic or Grotian theories as to those who, in our own time, have come to accept other views and to regard the Anselmic and Grotian views as mechanical and inadequate. Even where the theory has been surrendered—as frequently occurs among us in these days—the fact may be held with an increasing tenacity, the more so because it is vitally related to experience. It is these vital experiences which remain unchanged, in es-

¹⁹ Balfour, "The Foundations of Belief," p. 285.

entials, from generation to generation; for example, faith, repentance, forgiveness, love—the whole group of graces which constitute the Christian ideal of individual maturity. But they are not the fruitage of reason; reason can but deal with their relations, their ground, and application; these Christian ultimates spring from the vital relation of the believer to his Lord, mediated through the New Testament records.

The discouraging element in our whole survey for those who feel the dogmatic standing-ground crumbling beneath their feet is the fact that, since the noblest efforts of reason pass thus into disuse, reason herself can be credited with no finality. The authority of reason is not, however, conditioned by absolute finality. It is, for me, simply my own personal thought-attitude and thought-relation to the world of reality, whether of thought or of things. Its authority is final *for me*, since there is nothing, not even the reason of another, which can do for me what it does; it is absolutely the only channel through which I can reach these ends so essential to the life of maturity. To deny it is to commit intellectual suicide. It is no discredit to my reason that it bears fruit in apprehension and not in comprehension; I may know truly, though I know but in part. And it is no discredit, no disproof of its mediate authority that its verdict is sometimes challenged by a conclusion more ultimate and ends in a reversal. The hands which were too

unskilled for my task when first it brought them to it are still the hands which must perform the task, though only after many blunders. That is what they were made for, and they are my sole dependence. This too is their rightful authority. It is to be expected that there will be crudity and misjudgment; how should we escape it in theology when every other science has had the embarrassment of it? At the same time there is an immanent finality about this faculty which we call reason, in that it belongs to reason as its peculiar task to do for knowledge in general just what we have been trying to discover as the fruit of its labors in the field of theology in particular. It is this instinctive sense that keeps us ever at the business of generalization, at the formulizing, synthesizing process. We shall arrive too; but we cannot anticipate God's time. Meanwhile, it is reassuring to know that vastly more may be implicit in life than is explicit in thought.

The feature of reason which I have ventured to call its "immanent finality" ought to enable us to put the emphasis where it belongs, not upon the lack of finality which characterizes reason, but upon the perfectibility of reason; upon the fact that we may, with the advance of knowledge in all departments of life, expect larger and larger service from reason in theology. Not that we shall ever take the place of absolute submission to the crystalized reason of creeds and Confessions—whether

they be old or new—but that we shall be able to make continually nearer approximations to the ultimate realities.

While the right of the individual to exercise judgment in all matters involved in his life as a moral and religious being is unquestioned, it is also obvious that collective reason will outweigh in authoritativeness and adequacy of judgment the conclusion of the average individual. "We believe that the individual should accept as in some degree authoritative the results of the reasoning of the race, and, provisionally, the authority of general consent."²⁰ The conception of the race as an organism is a fruitful one, and suggests at least this, that the individual reason where competent must assist in correcting the details of doctrine, the fundamental truth of which it accepts.²¹ The admission of the authoritativeness of a proper consensus is simply the recognition of the truth of the ancient proverb, "*Nemo solus sapit.*" Every thinker of note in our own day recognizes his indebtedness to earlier laborers in the same field and in related fields. It is more and more being impressed upon us that we need the total product of the great departments of thought to give us truth in any one of them. Philosophy cannot ignore science, nor can theology ignore either science or philosophy. And yet the authority of any con-

²⁰ Wilfrid Ward, "Hibbert Journal," I, pp. 677-692.

²¹ *Ibid.*

sensus is not the authority of its numerical strength only; it is rather the authority of its great names, and, even more ultimately, the authority of its conclusive product. Great names alone ought not to be final; only indubitable reasons can be final. But great names in the field of thought stand for points of progress; individual genius has pioneered, collective judgment has approved and formally enunciated.²² Such is the history of thought; but it becomes continually more difficult for any single genius to carry the collective judgment with him. The consensus figures more largely with us than with earlier Christians for the simple reason that we know so much better what others are thinking. Cosmic life tends to become a conscious unity, and our own thinking receives a check from the thinking of others, from the atmosphere of thought in which we live, as it did not when a more isolated life was possible. Yet the consensus which we take account of to-day is less and less the consensus of yesterday, of some past formula; it is rather the consensus of current opinion. Ought it to be so? Ought the earlier consensus, because of its hoary age, to have logical precedence? Is its legitimate finality, derived when so many concurrent conclusions were totally inconclusive, such as to overshadow the current consensus? Some one will ask us to point out the modern consensus. There is no school of opinion that has the field all to itself; but

²² Wilfrid Ward, "Hibbert Journal," I, pp. 677-692.

there never was a time when the consensus was undisputed. Even the ecumenical councils witnessed many a battle of words—to be silent concerning other forms of strife—before they could be sure that there was a consensus, much less what it was. Yet it seems evident that the modern idea of development, with its emphasis upon the legitimacy and imperativeness of the historical method, the emphasis upon the vital and social aspects of the faith—do they not as truly represent a consensus as any ancient symbol?

Truly, it is “with all saints” that we shall apprehend “what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth, and . . . know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge . . .”;²³ and this as we are “strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man.”²⁴

²³ Eph. 3 : 18.

²⁴ Eph. 3 : 16.

III

CONSCIENCE

S SHALL we find the seat of authority in conscience? Before attempting an answer, it is pertinent to ask what conscience is. Nor will an offhand description of the moral faculty, as it theoretically or conceivably ought to act, suffice. The definition must result from legitimate induction, and must be sufficiently comprehensive to embrace the phenomena of the actual conscience of every age and race. The power of choice in view of moral ends is generally recognized as belonging to man as man;¹ and man as man, in his every moral choice, comes under the stress of obligation. Two factors thus emerge and assume proportions of general validity—the moral distinction and the feeling of obligation. These taken together denote conscience in its universal aspect. In its concrete exercise, obedience to duty brings a feeling of complacency; disobedience or neglect, feelings of rebuke or remorse. But when we have said that in the universal manifestations of conscience there are discoverable the notion of a right

¹ Strong, "Systematic Theology," sixth edition, p. 45.

and a wrong and the stress of obligation to do the right, can we say more? I think not, except to add by way of explanation that these elements which constitute the "moral constant"² discover themselves only in concrete cases demanding adjustment of personality thereto, there being in mind always a particular obligation, a particular right, and only in advanced stages of personal development an explicit notion of abstract right and abstract obligation. But there is, even in the conscience of a mature personality, a predominance of the concrete, the general moral bearing of the individual manifesting itself in a succession of specific moral choices.

So much for that which is plainly explicit in universal conscience. But I believe that there is more implicit in universal conscience than is explicit in it. In other words, there are often latent capacities in the race which realize themselves only in its highest types; and if one is to discover how great a thing conscience is, he must not only count, but weigh. When we undertake to discover certain aspects which shall be evidenced by every individual, we are under the necessity of making elimination after elimination, until at length we have in a very true sense reduced the matter to its lowest terms. That is a necessary procedure; for unless there is in universal human nature an irreducible moral minimum, we are reduced to moral chaos. There must

² Newman Smyth, "Christian Ethics," p. 33.

be such a constant as to warrant the assumption of a universal reign of moral order as the normal and ideal state, if not the actual. But when we weigh personalities, we discover a moral maximum; and this we may as truly say belongs normally to the nature of man as man. If we discover that, upon the occasion of certain stimuli and ideals, there develop more or less uniformly certain further moral traits, we are entitled to say that these too are elemental in conscience. Man as man is not to be delimited by the lowest types, the rather he is what he is seen to be in the highest. The Christian experience characteristically develops and discloses latent aspects of conscience. In measure as that experience approximates the standard of life revealed in the personality of Jesus, the voice of conscience becomes the voice of God.

As in the universal aspects of conscience there is discovered a moral constant, so there is also a variable. One man believes the right to lie in this direction, another in that. Two systems of thinking propose diverse or contradictory definitions of the right. The Canaanitish mother passes her child through the fire; the Hindu mother commits her child to the Ganges; the Christian mother commits the future of her child in prayer to God—all under the stress of obligation; because it is right, they say. They agree that the right must prevail, but how diverse is their definition of the right! In the common phenomena of conscience it is the moral

■

variable which is most in evidence; and yet it may be said that in measure as conscience becomes enlightened and Christian, even this moral variable tends to become a constant, and judgments as to just what is right and just what is wrong tend to agree.

This Christian development of conscience is consciously realized in Christendom under tuition. There is the general recognition that conscience as the moral reason must be put to school to enable it to determine accurately what is right. In other words, while the moral distinction may be regarded as intuitive, the specific application of it is realized only through conscious exercise of the powers of reason. I have to think just *what* I ought to do, and *why* I ought to do it; and in numerous cases, through the complexity of details involved and the number of considerations bearing upon the immediate issue, so far from yielding clear and definite outlines for action, the moral reason is scarcely able to arrive at a conclusion at all. Thus, while under Christian tuition the moral variable tends to become a moral constant, so long as limitations of judgment remain, to say nothing of particular individual limitations, there will be differences of opinion, even among Christian people, about the details of duty. Lecky remarks³ that "Every religious and, indeed, every philosophical system that has played a great part in the history of the world

³ "The Map of Life," p. 51.

has a tendency either to form or to assimilate with a particular moral type, and in the eyes of a large and growing number it is upon the excellency of this type, and upon its success in producing it, that its superiority mainly depends."

But while the development of conscience in Christendom has been consciously realized under tuition, that tuition is less and less conceived as a compulsion, an arbitrary imposition of standards only externally related to the individual. There is a fuller appreciation that Christianity in the person of its Founder and in the totality of its principles is but the objectification of an immanent principle of life, the structural law of the human soul—a law revealed elsewhere only "in the normal appetences of the human constitution."⁴ The fact of this immanent law of life expressed in the normal appetences is an exceedingly important observation. The fact also of its general infringement, though variously accounted for, is quite generally conceded.

The truth that the external standard of Christianity but brings to perfect statement the internal, structural standard of human nature, throws light upon the excellences of the moralities which have obtained recognition and, to some extent, held sway where the objective Christian standards are not known. Whatever of permanent validity may be found in any pagan system, ancient or modern, is due to this fact. While we should scarcely expect

⁴ Robins, "The Ethics of the Christian Life," p. 81.

that any system of ethics which should be able to organize the whole of life, social and individual, for harmonious self-expression would thus arise, we are quite at liberty to acknowledge that important and extensive bearings of ethical truth, of permanent validity, have thus discovered themselves.

Emphatic dissent from Martineau's theory of conscience,⁵ as indicated in the following passage, must be expressed: "It is all contained in this, that as the instinctive impulses turn up within us, one after another, and two or more come into the presence of each other, they report to us their relative worth, *and we intuitively know the better from the worse*" (*italics mine*). Again he says, "We are never left in doubt which of two simultaneous impulses has the nobler claim upon us. This natural estimate is what we mean by conscience."⁶ It is to be granted that in all probability the vast majority of moral choices occasion the distinct judgment of *a* better and *a* worse; but that this is the true and ultimate better or worse cannot be granted. Martineau further widely separates the authority of reason and the authority of conscience, and says "reason for the rational, conscience for the right—these are the sole organs for appreciating the last claims upon us, the courts of ultimate appeal, whose verdict it is not only weakness, but treason, to resist."⁷ Can this dissociation of reason and con-

⁵ "The Seat of Authority in Religion," p. 46.

⁶ Martineau, *ut supra*, p. 76. ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

science be accepted? Suppose that the moral constant *is* intuitive, is it intuitive in some higher and more distinctive sense than those other intuitive factors which condition all modes of the soul's activities? It is not held that these are independent entities. "Right," as a presentative intuition, belongs in the same category with space, time, substance, cause, final cause.⁸ All or any of these depend for their manifestation upon a movement of the total complex of the mind's powers; and all alike, primarily, are manifested in that total movement of mind which we call reason. All that is demanded as a foundation for ethics is that this power to converge the whole complex of powers upon the field of morals shall "be found integral and normal in the soul's actual capacities." That is to say, if when dealing with questions of personal relations, there develops the notion of a right course and the feeling of obligation relative thereto, just as when dealing with physical existences and events within the natural universe there arise the notions of time and space—and it seems quite evident that this is the case—nothing more can be demanded by way of distinction for the moral faculty. The idea of right is not more absolute and imperative in its sway over us than are the other primary intuitions, and all assert their authority through the medium of reason, however widely the fields of operation may vary. The place of reason, the relation of reason to

⁸ Harris, "Philos. Basis of Theism," n. 45.

the moral imperative, will appear in any proper rationale of the actual moral activities of the soul. The factor which is logically prior in such activity is the intuitive distinction between right and wrong; a secondary factor, but one actually prior to the exercise of conscience in specific cases, is the idea of ends—the individual, social, and religious ideals which the soul cherishes in the hope of their achievement, or to which it bows in recognition of their rightful authority. This secondary factor is, in brief, the moral atmosphere in which conscience operates. It is supplied by judgment, experience, social ideals, and standards, and accepted religious standards. It is in this moral climate, to change the figure, that conscience must carry forward all its operations; it cannot deal with issues that belong to a different latitude, but of necessity confines itself in its particular decisions to what it finds at hand. This moral climate may be warm and cherishing, or it may be cold and repelling; but conscience must make itself at home there. In other words, our judgments of worth will be limited to the things actually within the range of our experience. Both this logically primary and this actually secondary factor are involved in every specific movement of the moral nature. But in any such particular case, what elements may be discerned? It is just at this point that the part which conscience as *reason* moving in the realm of morals becomes conspicuous. When conscience passes upon

the conduct of others, the wider term, "the moral faculty,"⁹ is perhaps preferable; for it is the application of the accepted canons of judgment and standards of conduct to specific cases, and the subsequent sense of obligation to do the thing approved, which are embraced in conscience in the narrower sense.¹⁰ But, whatever the term used, it is reason which identifies the moral quality of a particular act. "The quality of right or wrong is connected with particular actions, feelings, or purposes, and these are affirmed to be right or wrong, according as they have or have not such a moral quality. This application is both a perception and a judgment—a perception in that it sees the ethical quality in the deed or motive, and a judgment in that it affirms the connection. . . Manifestly these judgments of application belong to the general judging power of the mind. . . The judging capacity will err without the light of true and full information concerning the place and purposes of the action. And its insights and affirmations will vary according to the degree in which all the elements entering into the particular conduct are understood and considered."¹¹ Thus the authority of conscience is inseparably wrapped up with the "authority" of reason—Martineau's term¹²—and cannot be dissociated from it; that is to say, the only

⁹ W. N. Clarke, "An Outline of Christian Theology," p. 199.

¹⁰ Cf. Strong's "Systematic Theology," p. 255, sixth edition.

¹¹ Valentine, "Theoretical Ethics," p. 68.

¹² Preface to third edition, "The Seat of Authority," p. x.

actual, concrete results obtained from the persistence of conscience are mediated through reason. And, it is important to add, they are liable to all the perversions and limitations of reason.

At most, conscience is but "an echo of the voice of God."¹³ Martineau overstates the facts of universal conscience when he says, "When conscience was found to be inseparably blended with the Holy Spirit, and to speak in tones immediately divine, it became the very shrine of worship; its strife, its repentance, its aspirations, passed into the incidents of a living drama, with its crisis of alienation and reconciliation, and the cold obedience to a mysterious necessity was exchanged for the allegiance of personal affection . . .; the direct love of God shines forth."¹⁴ Such a statement is true of only the highest types of Christian conscience; and such types are not self-produced, or, as Doctor Martineau would put it, by the immediate agency of God; they are mediately produced. "The tests," he continues, "by which we distinguish the fictitious from the real, the wrong from the right, the unlovely from the beautiful, the profane from the sacred, are to be found within and not without, in the methods of just thought, the instincts of pure conscience, the aspirations of unclouded reason. These are the living powers which constitute our affinity with God."¹⁵ It is quite true that man is

¹³ Doctor Strong.

¹⁴ "The Seat of Authority," p. 75.

¹⁵ *Uti supra*, p. 297.

normally related to God by such innate capacity for right, truth, and beauty; and it is also true that no amount of mere external pressure, whether of "moral suasion" or of physical force, can bring to manifestation in real character this elemental capacity for godlikeness; but it is not true that there is no external standard by which latent moral capacity is developed and guided. Christendom unites in the practical recognition of the ultimacy of Jesus as such a standard, and in the proximate authority of the Scriptures as bringing Jesus definitely before the thought, both in his person and in his relations to life.

The preeminence of conscience, whether as the moral reason or in the narrower sense of capacity for the moral distinction and its correlated sense of obligation, lies in no greater immediacy of operation, but in the fact that its subject-matter is morals. Not the "faculty," but the matter with which it deals, gives the generally recognized superiority of conscience to the other powers of the soul. It is not the only faculty through which God mediates his will, but it is the channel through which he mediates the matter of supreme importance to us. The mandates of conscience are not more categorical than the verdict of reason in any other field of thought; in other words, there are logical distinctions quite as categorical as the moral distinction—matters axiomatic for thought, the disregard of which brings intellectual self-stultifica-

tion, thought-suicide. Just as in the necessary thought of God the moral nature stands preeminent, so in the hierarchy of the soul's powers the moral nature is supreme.

The "categorical imperative," since it insists upon the "right" as a rule of action, and not simply as a basis of judgment, has thereby a greater prominence in a growing nature. And this comes about through the conflict which, as a rule of action, "the right" must wage with impulses in a contrary direction. It is true that reason always figures in conscience, but always as related to something done or to be done; it is not reason working toward a theory of things, and meanwhile unaffected by emotional stress; it is reason performing its function under the bombardment of impulses which set themselves against the will as it endeavors to carry into execution the affirmations of reason under the impulsion of the "categorical imperative." This moral conflict affords the conscience greater prominence than results where there is not such an opposition of impulse to the verdict of judgment.

The question of pressing importance for the student of ethics is, "Whence comes the categorical imperative?" What makes one feel that the right has claims upon him? Speaking of the "form" of conscience, Paulsen says it "is universally the same—the knowledge of a higher will, by which the individual feels itself internally bound. This higher will is, in the last analysis, universally regarded

as the will of a superhuman, of a divine power.”¹⁶ The content of conscience Paulsen regards as a product of development, but says: “In my opinion the time will never come when men will cease to regard the morality which they have evolved from their innermost being as derived from the essence of God or the nature of the All-real.”¹⁷ This moral factor, so persistent in every age and type of humanity, can but find its ground in the very nature of things, and thus in the essential being of God. This law of “the right” connotes a will which has made it structural in humanity, and to whom the obligation to observe it is due.

Concretely, the “categorical imperative” tends to connect itself with a more or less unified ideal of life and duty, and is not exhausted by a series of particular acts. It thus urges the individual on, through self-scrutiny and the exercise of will, to the realization of this ideal. He comes to cherish defined notions of what the citizen, the head of the family, the neighbor, the child of God, ought to be; and he feels the stress of a duty unfulfilled as he contemplates these ideals.

It is in this connection that he becomes aware of the perfectibility of the ideal, he discovers that what he thought sufficient to fill out the moral ideal no longer suffices; that in his approach to it the ideal has moved on and seems perhaps farther than ever

¹⁶ “A System of Ethics,” p. 364.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

away. And it is just here that there arises also the sense of an obligation to perfect the ideal, the duty of bringing all the powers to bear upon the whole problem of life's end and the relative scale of its values. In other words, one realizes here not only the duty of obeying conscience, but the duty of having a trustworthy conscience. Says T. H. Green: "As it stands before the mind of any particular person, the ideal will not directly yield an injunction to do anything in particular which is not in his mind already associated with good results, nor to abstain from anything which is not already associated with evil results. But while it will not instruct him as to the physical or social consequences of action, and through such instruction yield new commands, it will keep him on the lookout for it, will open his mind to it, will make him ready, as soon as it comes, to interpret the instruction into a personal duty."¹⁸

Such a progressively unified ideal of life is not simply the reflex or summation of contemporary views. It is very true that it will deal only with objects and relations made explicit in contemporary life. Yet these will frequently appear in such combination as to afford a virtually new ideal which "may differ from the universal conception and mode of life so widely, indeed, that it may even bring the agent into conflict with custom, and that this conflict may not arouse pangs of conscience,

¹⁸ "Prolegomena to Ethics," fourth edition, p. 379.

but be recognized as a moral necessity."¹⁹ It is thus that the moral history of the race has been wrought out, through heroic conflict of high souls with the objective morality of their times for the realization of a nobler morality. Passed through the marvelous alembic of human personality, the ideal reasserts itself with ever-increasing power and ever-heightening splendor.

The goal is perfection, the perfection of a harmoniously organized and flawlessly realized personal and social life. "The categorical imperative" impels one ceaselessly toward that goal. For the Christian the goal of life is summed up in the injunction of Jesus, "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." To be sure, the meaning of such high morality dawns but gradually upon the soul; yet in the white light of it all other goodness pales.

We have seen that conscience makes use of conventions, of historic beliefs and ideals, that indeed it cannot express itself in entire independence of these, wholly *de novo*. Objective standards not only actually figure in the individual conscience, but also necessarily figure there. It is reasonable to believe that if there were given in some concrete instance the realization and objectification of the ideal it would greatly hasten the general rise of conscience to the ideal level. What the immanent law of life has more or less insistently urged through the

¹⁹ Paulsen, "A System of Ethics," p. 370.

whole moral history of the race would be greatly hastened by the incarnation of the ideal in a human person. Then would flash forth upon the consciousness of the race that perfected ideal of its life which else were seen only dimly as in the early dawn of some winter's morning,—not something other than the ideal implicit in human nature, but the very completion and summation of it. This, Christianity believes, was actually realized in Jesus. It believes in the finality of Jesus, however far removed from finality certain dogmatic views of his person may be. This is far from saying that such a vision of the perfected life, the moral ideal, is all that is necessary. It is only to say that so much is necessary, at least; and that a clear view of the goal makes the problem immeasurably more simple for those who are in earnest to reach it. To be sure, such a vision is not of itself alone a sufficient dynamic for its own realization. But to accept Jesus as the end of the law is to know him as the dynamic of the moral life. The Christian more than any one else feels the binding nature of the ideal, but he more than any other realizes the freedom which a perfect law secures.

In Christian experience the authority of conscience, once inexplicable though persistent in its assertion, becomes the authority of a Person. It is not simply the voice of the normal in man clamoring from within for the satisfaction of the natural appetences; it is the voice of Jesus saying, "This is

the way, walk ye in it." In Christianity conscience has found its Master, whose authority is ultimate. Yet we are bound to recognize that the will of the Master and the immanent law of the soul's life—for they are one and the same—become definitive and effective only through conscience. "Nothing else can come so near to man, nothing else can command him to abjure its authority. No word of God can come to him otherwise than through this faculty." ²⁰

²⁰ "Presbyterian and Reformed Review," April, 1900. Quo. in Art. by Henry C. Minton.

IV

CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS

WHAT is to be understood by the term? It may be defined as comprehending "those spiritual exercises of mind" which follow a trustful acceptance of Jesus as Lord, and which accompany obedience to his will. There may be those who wish to extend Christian experience to ages and climes which have been unaware of the historical Jesus; and probably a great majority of theologians would recognize the possibility of a saving attitude of personality toward the moral factors of life in any age or place where man as man exists. If in any true sense the historical Jesus brings us to a transcendent Christ, it should not be difficult to allow his working beyond the limits and before the origin of institutional Christianity. Especially should this be true if he is in truth the immanent principle of normal personal life. But it is that explicit Christian consciousness as we have above defined it with which we are here to deal. For in any conceivable experience realized beyond the borders of historic Christianity there would presumably be an immaturity and fragmentariness such

as to forbid its being taken as a proper example of the normal Christian consciousness.

Nor shall we be permitted to confine attention to the individual Christian consciousness, for it is itself—in part at least—a social product; and when segregated it is liable to the charge of fragmentariness. There is constant interplay between the individual and the social consciousness, a progressive interaction which gives definition. My experience as a Christian is not something wrought out in isolation; I realize it, the rather, in my normal relations with my fellow-beings, and it is my awareness of a controlling and differentiating factor in these relations, as truly as it is the more especial sense of personal communication with God. And my experience is realized in terms not of my own making; it becomes definitive to me in the terms of social origin which constitute the intellectual atmosphere of the times and supply the working vocabulary of every department of life. Even were Christian experience reducible to the mere feeling of dependence, that feeling would have a different connotation in successive ages. To one Christian it might signify the dependence of a subject upon the will of a sovereign, to another a relation to governmental expediency, to another a relation to personal love—the dependence of a child upon a Father. Social opinion modifies the form of individual experience, and even more conspicuously the definition of it.

Such authority as may attach to Christian experi-

ence will be the authority of those indubitable facts which that experience, both individual and social, progressively certifies. "Thus the testimony of the individual Christian, who in his limited experience has tested his faith and found it workable, is confirmed by that of the great company of men and women of all ages and races who have been making a similar experiment, and who have arrived at like results."¹

It is reassuring to the modern Christian that Christian consciousness has harmonized in its great outlines with the fundamentals realized in the circle of believers in immediate touch with Jesus in his earthly ministry; that Christianity has uniformly throughout its history attested the fundamental teachings of its founder; that God is one and all-perfect, that man is a sinner, that Christ is in some sense a divine Saviour, that the Holy Spirit is the agent in spiritual renewal and discipline, that the benefits of the gospel are to be realized through faith, that men will be judged according to their deeds.² Upon some of these matters there is yet more or less controversy; but, in some form or other, these points of belief have persisted and are receiving fresh emphasis in our own day. It is to be expected of any revelation which God has made that it will exhibit historic consistency, that there will reappear in men's understanding of it and in their

¹ W. A. Brown, "Outline of Christian Theology," p. 134.

² E. H. Johnson, "An Outline of Systematic Theology," p. 16.

experience of its realities certain constant elements. And if the Christian religion can bear the test of experience in bearing the fruit of similar conviction from age to age, it will thereby add to our assurance of its divinity.

We are wont to think that if we could but get back to the actual writers of the New Testament we should stand upon the sure ground of revelation; but we need to remember that the revelation was a personal experience and not a dictation, and that the New Testament even is but the record of it. "The entire Christian revelation, from inception to completion, is a historical manifestation, made in life and fact. It is a self-manifestation of God in human experience. It is not rightly understood until it is traced back of all its expressions in speech or writing to its actual production in life."³ It is certainly conceivable that a Christianity might have ensued and persisted for generations without any written record of the initial revelation; this is exactly what took place for a generation after the death of Jesus.

In so far as Christianity is the realization of, or the serious aspiration toward, a definite moral ideal—and such it is in part—it tends to diffusion through social contacts. Men who do not consciously face the problem of Jesus discover in their contacts with men of Christian principle certain higher ethical levels than they have been accus-

³ W. N. Clarke, "An Outline of Christian Theology," p. 16.

tomed to, and come to recognize the imperative of this ethical revelation. This has been conspicuously true in heathen lands. It is a part at least of the attitude of Japan toward the ethics of Christianity. The fact of it in an almost indefinable way braces the whole morality of a so-called Christian land such as our own. But it is the contact with Jesus, conceived of, if you will, first of all merely as the historical personage, which affords the dynamic for the realization of a new ethic. For the mass of testimony supports the statement that men who come upon him, as it were, incidentally, are unable to pass him by as a merely historic personage; the transcendent in him makes good its claim to reverent consideration, and the transcendent, we may believe, becomes the true spring of a new life, the new motive center from which the whole ethical life is reorganized.

That transcendent aspect of Jesus' person is not a mere haze of glory which somehow awes the human spirit into wonder, and at length, perhaps, into worship. The testimony of Christian experience, both as recorded in the historic creeds—which dealt so largely with the Christological problem—and as recorded in modern witness to the supremacy of Jesus is that from this ground-work of the historical we pass, in Jesus, directly to have dealings with God. Hermann is quoted with approval by President King⁴ as saying, "This thought, that

⁴ "Reconstruction in Theology," p. 246.

when the historical Christ takes such hold of us, we have to do with God himself—this thought is certainly the most important element in the confession of the deity of Christ for any one whom he has redeemed.”

Logic may, by means of certain evolutions familiar to itself, reach the point where it acknowledges that Jesus is liable, with all phenomena of time and sense, to pass away, to be superseded. But Christian experience finds inexhaustible resources, unending revelation, in him, and has no anticipation of his passing. The fact that, with all the change of world-view, with all the reconstructions of philosophy, Jesus continues to satisfy, is able not only to hold, but to enhance his preeminence with natures of the finest moral and intellectual type, speaks volumes. Not only has the highest moral achievement of the race been attained under his inspiration; to-morrow will be his debtor. And for this reason, what we shall do will be the outcome of our ideals; the map of to-morrow which we have drawn to-day will guide us in action. And not only the achievements of to-day, but the ideals for to-morrow are Christian. All achievement is prophetic, and Christian achievement does not point to a pagan goal. Christ is great enough to fill our actual experience, and large enough to form our actual ideal; he is the fabric of to-day's life, and the form of to-morrow's purpose—for the Christian. Not only so, but having once found in the transcendent aspect

of the person of Jesus the very presence of God, the reality of God, the Christian is not likely to fear that this satisfying reality will pass away.

This conviction founds upon the primacy of personal relationships. They take precedence of everything else. There is no doctrine of exclusive egoism which can justify itself in the face of them. Friend has the right to friend, brother to brother, child to father; which is only to say that they are essential to each other. In the nature of things this quality of interdependence has been found to inhere, and especially in the sphere of the personal life. One man is no man. For the other man is essential to the education of his fellow; and, more than that, his presence and communion—apart from all question of results—is necessary. The necessity of social converse is structural in human nature; there must be fellowship—the spirit dies without it. It may be that speculation should not affirm this of God; it may be that some sort of social trinity will solve the difficulty; but upon the human plane there can be no question of the primacy of personal relationships.

Christian experience has found Jesus alive, not dead and buried in the Arimathean's tomb. Christian experience has borne witness to this truth in its sense of a personal relation to God in Christ. It is not as if, now having introduced us to the Father, Christ had gone to his own place; but rather as if we saw in his very lineaments the face of God, and

as if he must remain forever or we should be orphaned of our Father. "As in the days of his flesh, so now and forever, he is the living link and bond of union between God and mankind; . . he lives in the glory of the Father as the undying, unfailing, unforgetting friend and Saviour of men; . . he still represents God to men and men to God, so that in him God and men are united in a living peace; . . men on earth, thinking of God, may still think of Christ, although unseen, as the one in whom they stand before him, and by whose mediatorship they are able to find their way to him."⁵

Through the agency of this relationship Christian life realizes its best, and into the reality of this relationship it continually grows. This is true, whether the individual Christian is of mystical temperament, so that he readily conceives of the unseen Presence, or whether he is of rational temper, so that he characteristically turns to the historical Jesus—however little he may end there. Jesus warranted the conception of our relation to him as a personal relationship of friend with friend, or brother with brother; and the reality of it bulks large in Christian consciousness.

The characteristic Christian trait is faith; faith is at the root of all Christian activity. And by the term faith we understand not assent to any set of propositions as true, not the acceptance of any narrative as credible, but an appreciation of personality

⁵ W. N. Clarke, "An Outline of Christian Theology," p. 366.

by personality, and a response of personality to personality; of the less to the greater, the weak to the strong, the simple to the wise, in such sense that the confidence thus expressed becomes a basis of action. Faith is not the credulous admission of the unproven and unprovable, but rather the intelligent acceptance of self-accrediting personality. Upon any such basis, faith must discern the personal in its object, to be constituted faith in the Christian sense. Thus Christian faith is not faith in the ideal which Jesus cherished, or faith in imitation of the faith which he is supposed to have exercised in his earthly career; it is faith in himself.

If Christian experience actually attests all or any considerable part of what has been attributed to it in our discussion thus far, there ought to be no question whether Christian consciousness has a definite content, a content which differentiates it from the non-Christian. The question which obviously occurs is whether there is in human nature as it is the adequate power of self-realization without any intervention or vitalization from God. Historic Christianity has confessed that there is not. However human nature was originally constituted, it does not now possess the power of itself to attain the ends for which it seems designed and to which in its best moments it aspires. Historic Christianity apart, the moral progress of the race were a doubtful factor in its life; but reckoning historic Christianity—with all its delinquencies and reversions—

as part of the account, it is manifest that there has been marvelous progress. This is manifest in social life in the modern humanitarian institutions, in the more humane administration of law, in the ideals of peace and brotherhood which the world has become familiar with; but it is even more conspicuous in the reality of sainthood amid the complexities of our modern world. It is a great deal easier, from the point of view of mere externals, to be a saint in the midst of a primitive civilization, where the social and economic life is singular and uncomplicated, than it is in the heart of our urban and complicated industrial communities with their almost cosmic interdependence. Yet every Christian pastor knows that some of the most beautiful Christian characters have developed in this most unfavorable atmosphere—characters exhibiting the very spirit of Jesus.

Is it, then, that the vision of a superior moral ideal, such as is afforded in the historic Jesus, has served to accelerate a process of moral evolution which would have occurred anyhow, though at a much slower rate—which is, indeed, occurring in the ends of the earth where Christianity is not known as yet? We may as well admit that the lines of church affiliation do not define the body of Christ; that some are counted who ought not to be, and some are missed who ought to be numbered. Yet I cannot say that two men are upon the same moral plane because they do the same things; not until I

know the whole range of motivity that lay back of the doing can I pronounce upon the worth of it. I may not say that a civilization is Christian because, having found the ethics of Christianity "best" for one reason or another, it outwardly conforms in the main. The man outside of the church may be a Christian, upon as high a level as the man within; but outward likeness of deed does not prove that he is a made-over man (though that likeness would never be complete, I suppose, unless he were truly Christian). Whether the process of his moral perfecting be an evolution simply, or grounded in a revolution, it must master his motives. Whenever that mastery is achieved, the man in whose life it is evidenced is a Christian, whether we have learned to call him so or not. But does that mastery occur apart from the special regenerative agency of God? We believe not. "For the positive theologian the course of religious history has been chiefly determined by the undue intervention of supernatural and incomparable factors. . . Liberal theology views . . . religious experiences (as) inevitable products of the spiritual nature of man and the world as created by God. Whereas, according to a positive theology, they are produced, in the crucial cases at least, by a special action of God."⁶ However the fact may be accounted for, there is a patent moral disorder which no amount of mere schooling has availed to

⁶ Forsyth, "Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind," pp. 219, 220.

remove. The Duke of Argyll was right when he said that "Man has a constant tendency to abuse his powers, to do what, according to his own standard of right and wrong, he knows he ought not to do. Human corruption in this sense is as much a fact in the natural history of man as that he is a biped without feathers."⁷ "The common moral judgment," says Doctor Clarke, "has its general form, discerning and estimating moral qualities wherever they are found; and in this general form it has always declared that life is not what it ought to be, and man is not doing his duty or fulfilling his destiny. . . The sense of fault, of moral failure and blameworthiness, is general and abiding. Mankind has judged itself, and condemns itself."⁸ Only the regenerating grace of God can avail to correct the moral disorder in individual human nature. "Holiness cannot be attained, as the pantheist claims, by a merely natural growth or development, since man's natural tendencies are wholly in the direction of selfishness. There must be a reversal of his inmost dispositions and principles of action, if he is to see the kingdom of God."⁹ This reversal is not brought about through a religious rite, through the alleged impartation of an "immortal spirit," through the creation of another soul in the believer (the "new man"), through the agency

⁷ Quotation in Robins' "Ethics of the Christian Life," p. 83.

⁸ "Outline of Christian Theology," p. 228.

⁹ A. H. Strong, "Systematic Theology," p. 449, sixth edition.

of the Holy Spirit operating without the use of means, *i. e.*, creatively; but by the Holy Spirit through the truth.¹⁰ No doubt there is mystery here, but "we may reconcile ourselves to invincible ignorance about what regeneration is, if only we experience what it does. And it does this, it provides for conversion of love and life. The Spirit regenerates a man, but a man converts himself, and truth is the effective instrument in both processes."¹¹

The important factor in Christian experience as related to regeneration is not the analysis of its process—for that does not record itself in experience—but its outcome as expressed in the Christian attitude toward life. The process of conversion, even, may be only indistinctly recorded in experience, and in such way as to preclude its recognition as a unity. There are many excellent people whose whole attitude in life is incontestably Christian, whose present experience is indubitably Christian, who are unable to point to a time when they "accepted Christ." And this will no doubt be increasingly true as attention is paid to the spiritual nurture of the child—a movement which has come surprisingly late, but to whose earlier advent there were theological obstacles. The possibility of this phenomenon arises from the fact that conversion, taken as a whole personal process which culminates in the joyous recognition of Jesus as Lord, is not a

¹⁰ E. H. Johnson, "Outline of Systematic Theology," p. 269.

¹¹ E. H. Johnson, "The Holy Spirit," p. 242.

single, simple movement of the soul. The various elements of the Christian life may be so presented to the child mind as to be accepted by the child and made working principles in its life, one by one, or gradually—not as a unity. It is doubtful whether the child mind could proceed to the notion of these qualities as a unity, except upon the basis of their concrete representation in a life, a truly Christian personality in close human touch with the child. And, even then, it is the dynamic of that unity which enforces not the unity itself as such, but the separate qualities as precept and principle of action, upon the child's perception. Jesus will mean much or little as an ideal to the child mind in proportion as he is made concrete in a loving human person in close touch with the child, or is known only as a name. Thus, while the child, under proper tuition, may accept as principles of action, and one by one through the budding-time of the soul, the fundamental elements of a working Christianity; it will be able only with maturer years, and by process of reflection and abstraction to recognize these principles as constituting a unity bound together in the living person of Jesus, of whom it had so long been told.

And thus it is that the burning question in every life is not that touching the possibility of a childhood conversion in this case or that; not whether I was actually converted then; but whether I am manifestly now a converted man, whether I

go to my daily task with the Christian motive and the Christian touch. Too many Christians are wont to confine Christian experience chiefly to a few ecstatic moments in its beginning and to suppose that its golden age is either in the distant past or in the veiled future. It is just to say that he is a Christian who has the Christian attitude toward life, the Christian spirit and aim, amid the complexities and perplexities of life. And when a man is a Christian, by the evidence of the fruits he bears, we have no right to try to work him over for the purpose of inducing what we think omitted or too insufficiently evidenced in his recollection of the earlier stages of his experience. The same God who operates in physical nature by the greatest variety of method may operate in individual spirits in such way as to achieve the same end by different means, to arrive at the same goal over different routes. And every variety of experience which "arrives," which actually culminates in Christian devotion, service, and sacrifice, is justified.

If what has been said about the possibility of an essential, though more or less inchoate, standing as a Christian in the case of a child is true, it is possible that the same fact may hold in some maturer lives. It is possible for one to accept one by one the governing principles of individual and social Christian morality, to hold these principles in profoundest loyalty, and yet never so to have had Jesus presented as to understand that these very

principles find their unity in his person, and the dynamic for their realization in him. And such people may be found in Christian lands. We but little appreciate how fully the spirit of Jesus may be dissociated from the name of Jesus, even where the name is known, and how the spirit may find acceptance as it comes to the soul in some human relation, when the person is rejected because of traditional prejudice. For example, if one were reared to think that Jesus was the religious property of the classes and not at all the inheritance of the masses, it would erect a barrier to the acceptance of Jesus; but that barrier would be no barrier to the spirit of Jesus in a loving human touch and service. Do you say that the very fact that the historical Jesus is thus left out from conscious acceptance leaves the acceptance of the Christian position defective? To be sure it does. But how many conventional Christians have a perfect apprehension of Christ? How many of them do not have to fall back upon the grace principle, even in their best-meant effort to be truly Christian?

Yet, after all, the type of experience which may claim to be normative is, doubtless, that which is realized under such conditions as render assured not only acceptance of the Christian attitude and loyalty thereto, but the acceptance of the person of Jesus and loyalty to him. Christian experience is not, however, an exotic; the relations in which it is realized are simply the fundamental human

relations ; it is, in fact, essentially a new bearing of life in the midst of these relations. And these relations may minister as truly to the spiritual nature, may become as really means of grace, as the more formal, conventional means of approach to God. The distinction between the sacred and the secular tends to disappear under this view of life. In the experience of the Christian man, in the relations of a truly Christian society, the two are one. Loyalty to the demands of the day's task becomes as truly religious as loyalty to the stated services of a church ; which is not to say that either alone fills out the ideal. Loyalty to Jesus will express itself in the faithful rendering of every form of service, and in the whole round of the day's life the reality of Jesus' presence will be manifested.

What shall we say, then, of the finality of Christian experience, defined as including what has been indicated in the foregoing paragraphs? I cannot refrain at this point from quoting the words of Professor Johnson : " Since the standards found in our constitution are liable both to be perverted by sin and to be misunderstood, their ' inscriptions,' so to speak, defaced or mistakenly deciphered, the Christian consciousness is not a trustworthy standard for the truth of doctrines which are in dispute. But if, on the other hand, its decisions on any point are uniform, Christians could not well imagine that they all have always erred as to what is the testimony of experience, or have confided too much in its validity.

This would be to refuse to self-knowledge the credit which, we have seen, belongs to a consensus in tradition and in the interpretation of the Bible. Worse still would it be to say that those two processes of oral transmission and merely intellectual exposition have a trustworthiness which must be denied to the operations of the Holy Spirit on the soul, for the sake of which the Bible was given and the tradition kept alive. On points, then, as to which the correct reading of Christian experience is disputed, there is every reason for rejecting the inerrancy of that reading. But none the less Christian consciousness is the standard of our established convictions, and conviction is essential to the practical efficacy of a truth. The doctrines fully attested by experience may be fewer than those that stand acknowledged by a *Credo*; but they are our working beliefs, and the only beliefs of ours which can claim high rank.”¹²

The individual consciousness must reckon with the collective consciousness of its own times and with the collective consciousness of other times as embodied in confessional utterances, as represented in the New Testament. It may discover in the synthesis those elements which are truly normal, which belong essentially to the Christian life. But the individual experience—and individual experience is the great end of the redemptional process—needs the constant interpretative presence of the

¹² “The Holy Spirit,” p. 208.

Holy Spirit, which always is available for the Christian in his handling of the truth, to enable it to make a proper synthesis and to rise into a normal condition. In other words, the standard afforded by Christian experience needs the constant correction of the historic epitome of life which we have in Christ, and the Christ in the heart becomes definitive and continues to be mediated through the Christ in the book. Neither individual nor collective experience renders needless a reference more or less constant to that historic channel of revelation in Christ—the Bible. It is a mysticism wholly misleading which hopes for the attainment of religious knowledge by direct communication from God of ideas, emotions, or powers; but it is a true mysticism which holds for the unfolding and application of Christian truth wherever found, and—because its product proves it the highest revelation of truth—especially of the revelation in Christ, the record of which our New Testament affords.

Christian experience approves itself to judgment as the consummation of all experience as the genuine and normal experience of God in the multiplied relations of life—an experience for which the nature of the soul is fundamentally fitted. Its reflex is Christian consciousness, which bears witness to the realities of experience. A proper and complete consensus of experience would result in a standard closely approximating the historic standard afforded in Jesus. But all historic attempts at such

a synthesis of the fundamental Christian consciousness have obvious limitations. There is no exhaustive and final summation of Christian consciousness among the Confessions; yet great progress toward a relatively ecumenical consensus is manifest in modern Christian thinking. The records are not yet made up, however; nor, with present human limitations, will they ever be closed; so we shall always need to refer to the Life in which is disclosed that finality we seek.

V

JESUS

WHAT was the attitude of Jesus upon the question of authority? It has already been pointed out that he rejected the authority of the Oral Law, and with it the authority of its recognized exponents. We have seen too, that while Jesus lived his disciples recognized him as having authority, and they made no actual appeal to any authority above his.

The unparalleled egoism of Jesus (if one may use the term in no invidious sense) is exceedingly impressive. He has more to say of himself than almost any moral or religious teacher with whom he might be compared. And this is so for the reason that he is himself the incarnation of his message. It is not enough that certain abstract truths shall find expression, attention must be centered upon this unique Person. If one were to eliminate the pronoun of the first person from the teaching of Jesus, the teaching would make a materially different impression. This prominence of Jesus in his message is conspicuously developed by the fourth Gospel; yet, from a somewhat different angle, it is

scarcely less prominent in the synoptic Gospels. Jesus is there represented as taking to himself as the expression of his own self-consciousness the Old Testament prophetic imagery of the Servant of Jehovah, which he does with the words, "To-day hath this Scripture been fulfilled in your ears."¹ Matthew represents him as putting his authority over against that of the rabbins, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time. . . But I say unto you . . ." (the I being emphatic). This formula is six times repeated in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount,² while the sixth instance is practically paralleled by Luke, though the pronoun of the first person is in this instance unexpressed.³

Not only did Jesus take this attitude in his teaching, so that it was remarked that "he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes"⁴—who always justified their teaching by citations—but he also intentionally directed the thought of his disciples to himself. Note how often the term "Son of man" is used, and that in practically every instance Jesus is represented as defining still further for his hearers the office and functions of the Son of man.⁵ In the fourth Gospel we have this "Son of man," who is also "Son of God,"⁶ calling atten-

¹ Luke 4 : 16f.² Matt. 5 : 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44.³ Luke 6 : 27f.⁴ Matt. 7 : 29.⁵ Instances are too numerous to cite, but take a concordance and scan the context in which in each instance the term "Son of man" occurs.⁶ John 10 : 36.

tion to himself in every discourse and conversation.⁷ *He* is the message, as he is the messenger, from God. He makes his conscious relationship to the Father explicit in his teaching. God is "our Father," "your Father," "thy Father," but he is also "my Father"; and, even in the synoptic Gospels, that sonship is unique. The Father is known only by the Son and those to whom the Son reveals him.⁸ "All things" pertaining to the truth the Father has delivered to the Son.⁹ Not only has the Son this all-wisdom, but he has all power in heaven and on earth¹⁰—two quite distinct aspects of authority. In the fourth Gospel there is an all-pervasive atmosphere of intimacy between Father and Son, and the relation becomes at least more explicit than in the synoptics. As in the synoptics, it is declared that "the Father has given all things into his hands";¹¹ and this declaration is paralleled by the explanation that "the Father sheweth the Son all things that he himself doeth."¹² The Father has given to the Son to have life in himself, even as the Father has;¹³ power to raise the dead,¹⁴ and to execute judgment;¹⁵ so that the Son is to be honored as the Father is honored.¹⁶ The Son alone has seen the Father,¹⁷ the Son and the Father are one,¹⁸ so that he that hath seen the Son hath seen

⁷ John 3 : 16-21, 31-36; 5 : 19-47; 12 : 44-50; 4 : 4-26; 6 : 22-59, etc.

⁸ Matt. 11 : 27; Luke 10 : 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Matt. 28 : 18.

¹¹ John 3 : 35.

¹² 5 : 20.

¹³ 5 : 26.

¹⁴ 5 : 21.

¹⁵ 5 : 27.

¹⁶ 5 : 23.

¹⁷ John 6 : 46.

¹⁸ 10 : 30.

the Father.¹⁹ This is the climax of the claims put into the mouth of Jesus by the writer of the fourth Gospel. It can be said of the total claim made by the writers of the four Gospels that it is so unique as to put Jesus out of the category of the prophets. We do not forget that Jesus made the impression of a prophet upon the people,²⁰ but the total impression which the Gospels make cannot be summed up in that term.²¹

But the uniqueness of Jesus' sonship is not more noticeable than his confession of subordination to the Father. There is a sense of dependence which expresses itself in the prayers of Jesus; not so much in their language, of which but little is reported, as in the fact that he prayed at all. It is the Father who sent him,²² he has come in the Father's name,²³ he lives by the Father,²⁴ and as the Father has taught him so he speaks;²⁵ the Father loves him because he does always the things that please the Father,²⁶ and of the Father he says, "The Father is greater than I."²⁷

Having noted the general fact of Jesus' assumption of authority and the further fact that the impression which he made upon his disciples, as reflected in the Gospels, was followed by the unhesi-

¹⁹ John 14 : 9.

²⁰ Matt. 14 : 5.

²¹ But see Forrest, "The Authority of Christ," p. 6, who says, "It is not by taking him out of the category of the prophets, but by recognizing his supreme and solitary greatness in it, that we shall reach the right conception of him."

²² John 5 : 37.

²³ 5 : 43.

²⁴ 6 : 57.

²⁵ 8 : 28.

²⁶ 10 : 17.

²⁷ 14 : 28.

tating concession of all he claimed—if not by the ascription of more than he claimed—we may inquire more specifically the mode in which Jesus exercised his authority while he was upon earth. We must limit the inquiry to the exercise of authority over men; for while Jesus' authority over nature and over unclean spirits is asserted and illustrated in the Gospels, it is his authority over men which has chief bearing upon our discussion. In no instance did Jesus exercise an authority of physical force. He even refused to do so, declaring that his kingdom was not of this world.²⁸ He steadfastly declared his mission to be that of a witness to the truth.²⁹ It is his pathetic appeal to his own nation, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?"³⁰ To the same audience he said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,"³¹ and some of them manifested an inclination to accept him.

To those who followed Jesus through his earthly ministry he was Master, teacher—a familiar designation reported by all four evangelists. The corollary is that they were the taught—disciples, in other words. Thus Jesus was not characteristically the wandering magian, nor the Galilean insurrectionary; he was a teacher. There was no compulsion but the compulsion of his person and of the truth that he taught. They freely left all and followed

²⁸ John 18 : 36.

²⁹ 18 : 37.

³⁰ 8 : 46.

³¹ 8 : 31, 32.

him. Doubtless a certain enthusiasm, born of current Messianism, mingled the motives of his Galilean followers. To this their own words bear witness.³² But there was an impulsion which surpassed that of patriotism or wonder—the moral dignity of the Messenger and the grace and truth of the message.

The term which more than any other defined the relation of the disciples to Jesus is the term "*pistis*," belief, a word which, while it has a variety of related meanings, dependent upon construction, etc., as used with the dative "prevailingly expresses believing assent," and as used in construction with prepositions, "a firm, trustful reliance."³³ As thus used, it covers both what Jesus said and what he was. It expresses primarily an attitude of personality toward the person of Christ and toward his message. In short, Jesus depended upon what he was and upon what he said, his own personal worth and the weight of his message, to compel men. And the response which men made is summed up in the term "faith." The Gospels nowhere represent Jesus as imposing a merely fiat authority upon men—an authority above reason, faith, and love; his compulsion was an impulsion, operating through reason, faith, and love. When many quondam disciples were turning back, Jesus asked the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" and they said, "To whom

³² Luke 24 : 21.

³³ HaDB., Article "Faith," B. B. Warfield.

shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”³⁴ The power of incarnated truth and love held them fast.

In the preceding paragraphs we have gone somewhat imperfectly into the question of the general impression which Jesus made upon his disciples, as that impression is reflected in the Gospels. There are some phases which we have not attempted to touch, much less have we thought to go in this brief discussion beyond the four Gospels. If the representations are just and sufficiently representative, that will serve the present purpose. The view of authority held was but the corollary of the view of Jesus' person. We must now go on, upon the basis of the New Testament representations, to such an estimate of the person of Jesus as shall determine for us the nature of his rightful authority over us, and the modes of its exercise. The risk here too is that the generalizations shall at length prove inadequate as a determinant of the authority of Jesus. Yet there is no other way open. I can never say what duty requires of me in relation to Jesus until I have settled for myself who he is. And I cannot settle who he is by any merely *a priori* proceedings.

D. W. Forrest, in his volume entitled “The Authority of Christ,” holds that the elements of Jesus' personality which supremely differentiate him from others are two, viz., his sinlessness and his mediator-

³⁴ John 6 : 68.

ship or lordship.³⁵ If one assert the sinlessness of Jesus, he is at once met with the objection that the inference is not legitimate, since we have only a fragmentary account of his life, with important reaches of experience wholly untouched. It may be granted that we have not here in our Gospels a biography, nor even the materials for one. 'At the same time, we do have historical documents emanating from the immediate circle of discipleship, whether written by personal followers of Jesus or not. The synoptic Gospels, and probably also the fourth Gospel, were written under the very close and intimate sense of apostolic authority. These men, under whose influence and from whose hand, mediately or immediately, we received our Gospels, had been chosen by Jesus that they might be with him;³⁶ and when a successor to the traitor Judas was chosen, the choice was limited to those who had companied with the disciples "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among" them.³⁷ The disciples who went forth under the Great Commission were to be witnesses not only to the resurrection,³⁸ but also to the main facts of the gospel,³⁹ because they had been with Jesus from the beginning.⁴⁰ Not only were they to interpret the gospel, to bring out its inner significance, they were to testify to the facts by which their message was constituted a gospel. And it is very significant that

³⁵ P. 10f.³⁶ Mark 3 : 14.³⁷ Acts 1 : 21.³⁸ Acts 1 : 22.³⁹ Luke 24 : 48.⁴⁰ John 15 : 27.

they so understood their mission. As Luke's was an occasional Gospel, so also in some measure, doubtless, were the other Gospels; and they probably all had the same general purpose which Luke tells us he had ⁴¹ (though it may seem best to make an exception of the fourth Gospel as being more interpretative than historical in aim, which is not at all to deny its historical basis). Luke says in so many words that it was his aim, having "traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto (Theophilus) in order." Thus, while we do not have a biography in the accepted sense of the term, we do have a historic portraiture, a total representation both true and sufficient to impress us with Christ as he was.

This portraiture of Jesus represents him as under the sway of a profound sense of moral obligation. There was moral stress; the temptation was no unreal thing. But there was no moral schism in Jesus, no great gulf between obligation and consciousness, declaring to the world, "That ought I to be, but this I am"; there is no seventh chapter of Romans in the moral experience of Jesus. While there is moral stress, there is no element of self-blame, no remorse, saying, "I shall never forgive myself that I did it." While there is a reiterated cry for help, there is no cry for forgiveness—and this on the part of One whose message is the most tender assurance that God forgives; One who even

⁴¹ Luke 1 : 3.

prayed, "Father, forgive them,"⁴² who taught his disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive. . ."⁴³ We rest for our judgment of Jesus' sinlessness upon what is given in the record, not upon what is omitted. We do have the narrative of the greatest crises in his life, and in those moments of exalted passion the evidence of moral defectiveness must, if ever, have impressed itself upon his disciples. But there is no breath of it in all the record.

We are impressed with the fact also that the egoism of Jesus never leads him to dilate upon his sinlessness. While it is true that he claims to do always the things which please the Father,⁴⁴ the fact is asserted not to call attention to himself, but to afford a reason why the Father who sent him is with him. We may well ask the question, in view of the belief in Jesus' sinlessness, "What now becomes of his egoism?" In this man in whom there is no sundering of ideality and reality, the wonted quality of egoism but bears the aspect of a normal assertiveness. When he bids men come or says to them, "Go!" when he declares that "all authority has been given unto him in heaven and on earth," there seems nothing incongruous about it; we instinctively yield the fullest allegiance to him, and attempt the completest obedience. What if, however, underneath all this aspect of moral sublimity and authority, there lurked in the soul of

⁴² Luke 23 : 34.

⁴³ Matt. 6 : 12.

⁴⁴ John 8 : 29.

Jesus the consciousness that his ideal was beyond him yet, that he too had fallen short, that—in the hours of his deepest moral stress—he too had failed? If he knew it and did not confess it, what becomes of his rights over men? If it was true and he did not know it—thought himself all the while a saint, as some mighty sinners among us have done—what authority over us shall we concede him? In the first instance he is false; as Forrest puts it, “It were a higher sainthood to sin and repent.”⁴⁵ In the second he is well-meaning, but weak; and we know that he cannot lead us out to truth and to God. No, we shall accept neither alternative; for, while there are gaps in the record, there are here portrayed the cataclysmic times when character reveals itself, this portrayal is by men who knew Jesus most intimately, and the total impression is of one whose life was the unfolding of the soul in perfect moral self-harmony. Jesus was sinless, and in this he has no human equal, no human second. Jesus was sinless, and in this—though not in this alone—lies his right to speak and our duty to obey.

While we do not forget the Messianic hope that lay deep in the hearts of the men who followed Jesus in his earthly ministry, nor the realistic forms which that hope bore, it must have been this unique moral self-mastery and harmony which at length held them. Jesus did not come in any demonstration of physical prowess, nor did he lay

⁴⁵ Forrest, “The Authority of Christ,” p. 30.

plans for the military realization of the kingdom. While he did work miracles, he was himself the supreme miracle, and it is difficult to believe that any manifestation of miraculous power could long divert attention from his unique moral and spiritual qualities. So overmastering were these that they rendered his disciples willing to commit themselves to him, even although they did not know how he was to realize his kingdom.

Sinlessness may seem too negative an expression with which to sum up the total moral impress which Jesus makes, yet it immediately connotes a positive quality of moral oneness with the Father which is even more impressively present in the gospel records than the quality of sinlessness. It may be doubted whether in these passages it is intended to represent Jesus as having in mind the metaphysical aspects of his relation to the Father. He claims a very intimate relation to the Father when he says, "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father; and no one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any one know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him."⁴⁶ Even that passage in the fourth Gospel, where Jesus is reported as saying, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,"⁴⁷ goes scarcely beyond this statement from the Gospel of Matthew; yet the fourth Gospel makes very explicit the intimacy of communion

⁴⁶ Matt. 11 : 27.

⁴⁷ John 14 : 9.

which subsisted between Jesus and his Father. Jesus is conscious of an unbroken reciprocity of relation, "Father, I thank thee that thou heardest me. And I knew that thou hearest me always . . . ;"⁴⁸ and again, "He hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him."⁴⁹ To a morally consistent self-consciousness we must add a unique God-consciousness.

The mediatorship or lordship of Jesus is perfectly consistent with these unique facts. It does not surprise us that one whose spiritual life is upon such a plane should address us with a tone of authority, should make otherwise astounding claims for himself. Of those words of Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labor (note the preceding context) and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."⁵⁰ Sanday says:⁵¹ "Could we conceive such words put into any other lips, even the loftiest that the history of mankind has produced? They are full of delicate self-portraiture. They present to us a character which we may say certainly *was*, because it has been so described. No mere artist in words ever painted such a canvas without a living model before him. The portrait is of One who is 'meek and lowly in heart,' whose

⁴⁸ John 8 : 29.

⁴⁹ John 8 : 29.

⁵⁰ Matt. 11 : 28-38.

⁵¹ HaDB., Article, "Jesus Christ."

yoke is easy and his burden light; and yet he speaks of both yoke and burden as 'his' in the sense of being imposed by him; he invites men to come to him, evidently with a deep significance read into the phrase; he addresses his invitation to weary souls wherever such are to be found; and (climax of all!) he promises what no Alexander or Napoleon ever dreamt of promising to his followers, that he would give them the truly supernatural gift of rest—the tranquillity and serenity of inward peace in spite of the friction of the world; that all of this should be theirs by 'coming' to him." The facts do not bear out the statement of Harnack that "the gospel as Jesus proclaimed it has to do with the Father only and not with the Son."⁵² We do not have to put "a Christological creed in the forefront of the gospel"⁵³ in order to assure ourselves that Jesus was not simply supreme exemplification of faith, but was himself its object.

The elements of that lordship over life which Jesus claims are stated by Forrest⁵⁴ as follows: "(1) He assumes that he has the title to pronounce without appeal on the value of the Old Testament revelation, to separate that which is eternal from that which is temporary, nay, affirms himself rather the fulfiller of it; and declares further that the revelation which he brings will never be superseded

⁵² "What is Christianity?" p. 154.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁵⁴ "The Authority of Christ," p. 32f.

—‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away.’ (2) He makes attachment to himself an essential condition to the spiritual blessing which he proclaims (for his sake, in his name). (3) By the attitude which men take to him their destiny will be determined. He is not only the law or standard of final judgment, he is the Judge himself.” Let it be granted that the words of Jesus are primarily of religious and not of metaphysical import; it is evident that they demand of their justification that estimate of his person which became, in part at least, explicit in the apostolic view, and which strove for adequate metaphysical expression in the ecumenical creeds—the fact of a transcendent element called “divinity.” We have evidences of a double stream of memorial concerning Jesus, even in the gospel records—the one a stream of historical fact, the other a stream of theological inference.⁵⁵ And it was inevitable, for the facts demanded inference. Yet we are not to suppose—indeed, we are forbidden to suppose—that the later notion of the person of Christ prevailing among his disciples of the New Testament era, was based entirely upon inference from the facts alone. There is in the Gospels considerable direct testimony of Jesus, and a very considerable body of indirect witness, upon this matter. It is not enough to declare that Christ has “the value of God,” because “it is an ambiguous expression. . . If he is to have the value of God

⁵⁵ Denney, “Jesus and the Gospel,” p. 329.

for us, it must be because we believe it is true to call him divine, just as we believe it is true to call God a person, though in both cases we are conscious that our terminology is only approximate—the adumbration of the eternal fact.”⁵⁶ “There is no rest in the halting, half-and-half theories which look for living power to a purely human Christ who never rose with power from the dead.”⁵⁷ As we follow the record, striving the while to keep within the bounds of the purely historical, we behold rising before us the inevitable Christ of thought, who is also the Christ of our faith—the Son of man who had power on earth to forgive sins, somehow become transcendent, the ever-living Lord of life, and we are willing to say with the writer of the fourth Gospel, that in him was “glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father,”⁵⁸ and with Paul that “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”⁵⁹

Granting, then, that Jesus is altogether what we have represented him to be, and that he has the right to speak, what is it that he says? In other words, what is the sphere in which his authority moves? It must be evident to any thinking man that Jesus is not an encyclopedist. Waiving the question of the limitations of his own knowledge, for the present at least, we may clearly discern that

⁵⁶ Forrest, “The Authority of Christ,” p. 46.

⁵⁷ Gwatkin, “Knowledge of God,” I, p. 240.

⁵⁸ John 1 : 14.

⁵⁹ Col. 2 : 9.

he made no effort to gather and classify and to pass on in authoritative form the facts and forces of the material world. He did not rewrite, nor even re-interpret history; he did not pass upon the questions of metaphysical theology about which theologians are still speculating; he did not deal primarily with social readjustments. Upon the last point Professor Peabody says: "Whatever social teaching there may be in them (the Gospels), and however weighty it may be, the mind of the Teacher is primarily turned another way."⁶⁰ Yet one feels that Jesus is keenly alive to the fundamental social relationships as they existed in his day (when they were necessarily much simpler than now), and cannot ignore the fact that he made the principles of the kingdom explicit in the terms of social relationships. Yet if one should refer to the teachings of Jesus with the hope of finding there a set of rules for the administration of society, or even a program for its regeneration, he would be doomed to disappointment. There is not even a program of final things, a minute chart of detailed events to come, such as one sometimes finds in the hands of authorities upon the subject. This is by no means to say that Jesus had not certain great principles concerning the future which he repeatedly made explicit in his teaching. He held, for example, "That the present life is weighted with unspeakable significance for the life to come; that a final judgment

⁶⁰ "Jesus Christ and the Social Question," p. 77.

awaits all men; that he himself is to be both judge and standard of judgment; that the end of all will be the establishment of the eternal kingdom of the Father, from which all evil shall be shut out.”⁶¹ Not a great deal more can be insisted upon with assurance that Jesus meant to justify it.

Suppose we narrow the field to religion and duty. If we allow that Jesus was a revelation of God and of the will of God for us, we do not mean to say that he has given us a detailed theology or a closely formulated ethic. He has done nothing of the sort. While much of the substance of the revelation is embodied in sayings of Jesus, the revelation itself was personal; we need the life of Jesus, the historical record, to supplement the sayings. But even that would be meager enough if the authority of Jesus were mediated from generation to generation, or from the Gospels to the latest generation, by the sheer process of imitation. The personal revelation from God is not only the explicit model of life, but its immanent principle as well. If it were only an external model, the record of it would be insufficient for our needs; but the ever-living Christ is mediated to the latest generation and to the latest hour of time, through the historic channel of the gospel story, and as the immanent principle of our life is capable of reproducing in us the normal manifestations of sonship to God in the forms of the life of our times.

⁶¹ Forrest, "The Authority of Christ," p. 331.

The possibility of such mediation bases upon affinity between the human and divine. If Jesus sufficiently revealed anything concerning our relation to God, it was that there is no great gulf of "kind" between God and men, between human nature and the divine nature; that the gulf which actually exists is upon the part of man, and is but a condition of abnormality. Jesus exemplified the far-reaching affinity—nay, unity—of the "two natures" in his own person, for "He is all one—that is the very strongest conviction that we have."⁶² And the mode in which this immanent law of life operates is not one removed in whole from the conscious normal processes of the soul; the soul must apprehend the principles of Jesus' thought and life, and embrace them as the law of its own life; but their authority is thus inward and vital, not merely external and arbitrary.

In our attempt to discern the mind of Christ we must employ discrimination, the faculty of distinguishing and evaluating. We must not suppose that a gospel which employs the forms of thought typical of another period than our own, and portions of which are couched in language induced by the occasional nature of the discourse, can be understood without just and candid interpretation. We shall discover the incidental, the local, the relative, in this record, and happy shall we be if we do not mistake the realism of it for its secret. We

⁶² James Denney, "Studies in Theology," p. 69.

cannot solve the problem of our lives by the rudimentary process of imitation. The case is not so simple as that. But we can come back to a living relation with God as we grasp the great principles which underlay the life of Jesus and found expression in his teaching concerning God and duty.

VI

THE RANK OF AUTHORITIES

THE Christian heart readily recognizes that all authority is of God. Our thinking will not stop short of this ultimate fact. But the final authority which Christianity actually knows, whether in history or in experience, is the authority of God in Christ. We cannot get beyond Christ; nor do we wish it, for we acknowledge in his words the summary of our experience, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Experience has found the deepest needs of the soul met in him, nor has it received the slightest intimation that he will some day be superseded. Only the vagaries of speculative thought, not the realities of experience, can be by any one supposed to warrant the conclusion that Christianity can be separated from Christ, can continue indefinitely and reach even higher levels, when the transcendent personality to whom it owes its origin and in loyalty to whom its best has been realized has long been forgotten. If Christ can be forgotten by the Christian heart, then may we also expect that the hope of an eternity of personal identity will prove an illusion, and the

whole structure of Christian faith and hope fall like a house of cards.

We are the rather fully warranted in the belief not only that Jesus will never be less to our earthly need, but also that as he is to us to-day the very Fatherhood of God incarnate, so he will always be; not only will he have for us "the value of God," he will be the only reality of God that we shall ever know, seeing that he is "the eternal Humanity in the life of God," beyond which our humanity cannot hope to explore; in him still will be summed up "all the fulness of the Godhead."

The important fact for us in this connection is, however, independent of that which Christ may be to us in the final state, the fact of his preeminence now—that he actually does command love and loyalty. Love and loyalty were never forced from any one; they are the instinctive response of the soul to noble and loving personality. No other power has ever been able to elicit their higher values. The most compelling argument for the right of Jesus to rule lies in what love and loyalty to him have done for humanity. All the best and noblest aspects of our modern life find rootage in these sentiments. Let the facts of experience, then, award to Jesus the supreme right to speak.

The further truth that all good elements discoverable in human life apart from the influence of the historic Jesus resolve to unity and harmony and proceed to fuller realization as he becomes known,

is a reason for believing in his right to speak. Christian experience attests the joy of response to his words, the fact that his will operates not as a stern, outward compulsion, but as a revelation to the soul of its own meaning—a flood of light upon its personal problem. Christian consciousness, as it reaches the higher levels, becomes aware that “in him we live and move and have our being.” However he may interpret it, the Christian will not dispute the preeminence of Christ in the life of the soul. We shall not get beyond him, but we may hope to “grow up into him.”

If, then, the authority of Christ is final for us, what of the Bible? The Bible is final for its purpose, which is *to bring us Christ*. When we say “to bring us Christ,” we mean not simply the bare facts about him, but the living perspective of that national and world history into which he came, the intimate portrayal of his personal bearing toward life, enough of his teaching to reveal his temper and impart his message—so that we say, “Never man spake like this man,” and to give us personal interpretation of the immediate meaning and effect of Jesus upon the first generations of believers. Nor could “other bibles just as good” be written, for the simple reason that they would not deal with this great historic life-movement and the truly historic personage in whom it centered from the point of view of the witness, probably not at all. The function of the Bible is to bring us Jesus, and

through Jesus to bring us to God, and it can be disputed by no other book, written or to be written; its authority is unique, an authority not simply historical, but—since it deals with vital processes—experiential as well. We may say, with Professor Fisher, “Normative authority belongs to the Bible. It is the objective rule of faith. It is not robbed of this character in consequence of modified theories of the mode and extent of its inspiration. If it be alleged that Christ is the one authority, yet it is through a critical study of the Scriptures, apart from subjective prejudice, that the knowledge of Christ is to be obtained.”¹

Reason as the power of discursive thought and reason as the mind operating in the field of morals constitute not two, but one mode of the soul's activity. Both processes figure in what we are wont to term Christian experience. And this for the simple reason that Christian experience is not an abstract and independent entity; it is concrete; it is always some individual's experience. Consequently reason and conscience are not simply interpreters, they are veritable mediators of the individual Christian's experience. While beyond a peradventure there are ordinarily recognized certain transcendent aspects of experience, it is yet true that so far as that experience becomes definite and not a mystic haze, it must be mediated by definite standards. Hence it comes about that the individual Christian

¹ “History of Christian Doctrine,” p. 11.

sees the Bible in the light of its interpretation by reason and conscience; particular expressions take on special meanings, and particular teachings authorize or involve specific duties accordingly. And independently of these current standards, no abstract truth or ethical demand embodied in the Scriptures can make its appeal effective, or realize itself in experience, except through the exercise of reason and conscience. They are the necessary forms through which truths of relation and of obligation are mediated to us. Until they perform this function, the Christianization of the individual waits. And it is their office exclusively to render this service.

At the same time, while this function is theirs in an exclusive sense, it is only a mediating function. It has no independent significance, it fulfils its office—in the discursive and moral aspects of it—by bringing Christ interpreted before us, and by revealing to us the particular aspects of duty. It is to be acknowledged that both the discursive and the moral reason are liable to limitation and to fault, and that they both need the correction afforded by a consensus of judgment. Yet, when account has been taken of the best available forms of the consensus, it remains for the individual to draw the final, personal conclusion; and he cannot evade the issue and make progress. We cannot hope to become Christian without learning to think, and actually thinking to conclusions, both about the rela-

tions of the Christian facts and concerning our individual obligation in view of them. Both reason and conscience have rights, whose denial is self-stultification, intellectual and moral death; yet these rights are held in trust.

Christian experience has a much wider significance than the merely rational or ethical indicate, which is not to say that it is ever either irrational or unethical. Christian experience must include the whole range of the soul's life as it makes progress from the Christian facts to the Christian goal; it must include not only the rational element, but the whole emotional and volitional field as well. What is the peculiar stress which is characteristic of Christian experience? What are the definite graces with which the Christian life is normally adorned? What is the characteristic Christian view of life? These matters have their answer in the soul as one makes progress "from glory to glory." Christian experience results from the application of the truth by the Spirit of God to the souls of individuals, and especially from the application of the truth as summed up in Jesus in the Christian Scriptures.

What is its authority? Just the authority of every vital process. The Christian Scriptures teach what we suppose them to teach if they are able to realize themselves in experience. Christian experience will at length leave unemphatic those matters which are secondary and will bring out into the white light

the primary interests. It is an interpretative norm, a standard which no theologian should dare to overlook, a standard which individual believers should consult—as they may in the best forms of the consensus. But, at the same time, it must be recognized that both the consensus and the consciousness of the individual are dependent upon the Bible. We believe in “the soul’s competence in religion,” but the term does not indicate a capacity for experience apart from the occasion and materials of experience. It means only that the soul is so framed that when it beholds arising from the pages of the book the majestic figure of the Christ, it can see and does see in him that Life which was the light of men; that it can and does realize the fact of his presence and guidance in the affairs of life; and that, with the Christ in the book and the Christ in the heart brought thus into definition and relation to the personal life, the soul may make progress from the infancy of faith to the maturity of knowledge with no other guide.



[illegible]

NO 3-49

NO 16 89



Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01018 2055